Love and the Interloper

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BY

Frank Frankfort Moore

Author of "I Forbid the Banns,"
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LOVE AND THE INTERLOPER

CHAPTER I

"WHAT distance is it to Rathdearg?" Harry Ainlie asked of the car-driver while the porter and station-master were placing the portmanteaux and gun-cases and the long case that held a couple of salmon rods and their gear, in the "well"—the hollow space between the seats of the vehicle. Of course the long rod case projected far beyond the boundary of the "well," but as it only encumbered the driver's seat, it did not matter—at any rate, the driver made no protest.

On hearing Major Ainlie's question he gave a start that caused his jaw to drop curiously. The look of keen intelligence that had been on his face was followed by one of astonishment; but this expression lasted only for a moment; his face assumed a look of extraordinary stupidity—

the look of a man who knows nothing and is incapable of knowing more. His face became a complete blank.

"Was it Rathdearg yer hon'r is afther saying?" he inquired.

"Rathdearg; yes. You don't seem ever to have heard of it, my good man," replied Major Ainlie.

The man took off his hat—it was a specimen, in a pretty fair state of preservation, of the tall silk hat of thirty years ago. Only a small portion of the brim was actually missing, though a considerable part was semi-detached from the parent trunk. He scratched his head thoughtfully, but without the smallest semblance of a thought appearing on his face.

"Bless my soul, Algy!" cried Ainlie, turning to his companion who was standing by. "What is the matter with the man anyway? Is this a specimen of the quick intelligence of the Irish you are never tired of jawing about?"

"Look here, my friend," said Captain St. Maur—he seemed to feel that it was necessary for him to get the man to bear out the statements which Ainlie alleged he had made more than once in respect of the quick-wittedness of the Irish peasant. "Look here. Can't you answer a simple question?

How many miles—more or less; you're not in a court of law on your oath—is it to Rathdearg Castle? Come now—quick, and you'll have an extra shilling when we arrive there."

"'Tis a long way, yer hon'r, that it is, and that's the thruth that it is, if I shud never speak another word," said the car-driver, sending his eyes wandering over the hills that added materially to the picturesque situation of the village of Ballyderreen, at which the very leisurely train had just deposited the two travellers on this grey August evening.

"Yes; but what is this long distance in miles?" asked Algy. "You know as well as we do that you have driven a hundred times — maybe a thousand times—between here and there. Come now, let me give you a lead over. We were told that it was barely six miles from Ballyderreen to Rathdearg."

"Six, barely six?" cried the driver. "Oh, they've been fooling of yer hon'r, whoever towld ye that. Six miles! Oh, by the powers! 'Tis a bowld six miles that it is, so it is!"

"How many miles is it over six? Don't be a fool," said Major Ainlie, getting impatient.

"'Tis a good seven miles that it is, every fut, sir, and that's the truth," said the man. "An'

if yer hon'r 'll be guided by me, I'd say that ye'd do well to sleep in the decent hotel that there is here, and that'll put ye in good thrim for the dhrive in the morning, so it will."

The two young men had had a view of the "hotel" five minutes before, and what they had seen of it did not fire their enthusiasm to make it their place of sojourn even for a night.

"What's seven miles to a horse like yours?" said Ainlie. "Why, it would do it inside the hour."

"Ah, save us all! Seven Irish miles inside the hour!" cried the driver, raising his hands, the whip in one of them. "For all sakes, gentlemen, don't let the poor craytur be afther hearing of ye making such a statement; 'tis wild he'd be at the thought of what was expected of him, and sooner than be brought to shame, he'd refuse to budge an inch."

"That's more like what we looked for from the Irish car-driver," laughed Ainlie. "We're getting on, but in one sense only. Well, even if we take two hours over the job we shall still arrive at the Castle before dark; it's only five now."

"Oh, yer hon'rs is sthrangers to these parts—that's plain as a pikestaff," said the jarvey. "Would

it be making too bowld to ask if ye have ever been in the counthry before? If ever y' have ye'll know how soon the sun sets here by what it does in England."

"And why should it set sooner, pray?" said Ainlie, highly amused at the man's gravity, for he had never once smiled.

"And what is there for the craytur to sit up for anyway, in a poverty-sthricken country like this, sir?" he asked solemnly. "Gentlemen, 'tis robbing myself I am, and that's the truth; but take my advice and don't come on till to-morrow."

"Why shouldn't we go on at once—tell us that, and be hanged to you!" cried Captain St. Maur.

"There's too many reasons for it, sir."

"Give us one of them."

The driver rubbed his crown with the palm of his hand.

"Maybe yer hon'r has never heard tell of the jews that fall in these parts," he said.

"I never did; but if any Jews are falling, I'd rather like to be present to see them come down," said Ainlie.

"'Tis the quare threatcherous things that they are, sir. Maybe ye'd be afther catching a cowld

that wud last ye for the rest of yer life if ye druv the five mile to the Castle this blessed day," said the man.

"Five miles? Is it only five miles now? Does the distance decrease as the sun goes down?" said Ainlie. "Come along now, my brave boy; mount to your seat and start the machine, or I'll take the reins myself and show you the way. Up you go!"

"Well, I call ye both to witness that I did my very best to keep ye from coming; so that if anything happens——"

"We'll run all the risks; we know enough of Ireland to be well aware of the fact that one doesn't land here without running certain risks," said Captain St. Maur. "I suppose there are some black eyes still in Ireland," he added with a wink.

"A power of them, especially afther a fair, sir," said the man.

"That's not exactly the sort you were hinting at," said Ainlie, laughing as he nudged his companion.

They had succeeded in clambering to the seat on one side of the jaunting car; it was something of a feat, for the sole of the iron step had at some time been wrenched off, and the part that remained

was of no use to any one trying to mount the vehicle.

"Is them guns in the mehog'ny cases?" asked the driver when pulling himself up to the other side.

"Yes; do you think that we'd be fools enough to come to Ireland without guns and fishing-rods?" said Captain St. Maur.

The man looked at him for a moment with an affectation of stupidity, in excess even of that which his face had worn before. Then he shook his head, muttering—

"Guns! Well, maybe there'll be no harm done. Anyway, I've done my best. Hiven must do the rest."

"What is the fellow jabbering about, I'd like to know," said Ainlie to his companion as the driver tugged at the reins on the other side of the car, and the horse allowed itself to be waked from its slumbers, and was so surprised that it went on without protest. That was the way to manage the "craytur," the driver explained later on. If you didn't start him before he was well awake "the ne'er a fut he'd put fornenst the other."

"Look here, Harry," said St. Maur, "I won't have you talk to me as if I were your personal conductor on this tour. Because I happened to be

stationed at the Curragh for a couple of years, you refer to me as if I knew all about the blessed country. Just remember that you are the boss of this show. It was you who bought the place, not me, thank goodness!"

The other laughed.

"Don't you make any mean attempt to wriggle out of the business, old man St. Maur," said he. "You know as well as I do that I bought the place on the strength of your stories of the fishing and the shooting in the neighbourhood."

"I don't take back a single story; but it is one thing to talk about the fishing and the shooting and quite another to take over the duties of the Man from Cook's," said St. Maur. "You'll know as much about Ireland in another month—maybe another week—as I do at the present moment."

"My dear chap, I only asked you what the man was jabbering about," said Ainlie. "I didn't appeal to you in the capacity of interpreter. I believe I know as much of the Irish language as you do. By the way, when are we to hear those 'arrahs' and 'begorrahs' that make up the sum of the stage Irishman's language? The driver even in his most excited moments never found it necessary to fall back on

either 'arrah' or 'begorrah.' I felt a bit disappointed."

"The stage Irishman is about as like the real thing as the Englishman of the French caricaturist is like a Londoner," replied St. Maur. "But what I should like to know is what our friend on the other side meant by trying to induce us to remain at the hotel," he added in a whisper. He might, however, have spoken in his ordinary voice. The road was in such bad repair, and the car jolted so, the driver would have needed to possess the ears of a cat to allow of his catching a single word.

"That's what I have been wondering myself," said Ainlie. "Was it that the fellow was lazy and so ready to throw up his job?"

"No fears," said St. Maur. "I never yet met a lazy car-driver when the chance of a good fare was before his eyes. He knows that strangers like you are ready to throw their money about."

"Who is it that's trying to take up the position of the personal conductor now? I'm the only stranger here this evening, I suppose," said Ainlie. "Do you know enough of the nature of the people to be able to explain what object the man had in view in keeping us here? He suggested a good deal by his way of talking, don't you think?"

"He certainly gave us a hint or two that it would be as well for ourselves if we remained," said St. Maur. "But I believe if we could get at the truth, which we needn't expect ever to do in Ireland, we should find that he was in the habit of receiving a commission on all the travellers he induced to take up their quarters at the shanty he called the hotel."

"I fancied at first that he was trying to make out the distance to be so much greater for purely business purposes: it stands to reason that the greater the distance the larger the fare—I suppose that rule holds good in Ireland as well as elsewhere," said Ainlie.

St. Maur shook his head.

"There was something below the surface, take my word for it," he said. "Well, anyhow, we had our own way, and here we are. Let this be an object-lesson to you in dealing with the Irish, my dear Harry. You just refuse to listen to any of them. You insist on having your own way, and you'll find that they are as easy to get on with as reasonable people."

"There's the true Englishman talking," cried Ainlie. "You express the sentiments of every English statesman that has undertaken to govern Ireland during the past two centuries. There is

no fear of your solving the Irish question inside the month."

"I didn't come here to solve any question except the question of grouse and salmon," said St. Maur. "By the way, I suppose that is your mountain before us."

"I haven't the remotest idea; but if it is mine, I am the owner of a deuced showy place," replied Ainlie. "My word! That is a proper sort of mountain to shoot over. What's that hill to the left of us, my man?" he shouted in the ear of the driver, leaning across the "well" of the cart to do so.

"'Tis no hill that it is at all, sir," said the man.

"What is it then at all?"

"'Tis a mountain that it is, sir; and more be token, 'tis Slieve Devenish that is its name."

"That's the name; the mountain is mine," said Ainlie. "There's a lake at its foot on one side, and a mile beyond is the sea—Atlantic Ocean, Algy—just think of that, my lad—the Atlantic Ocean!"

"No one could fail to have a deep respect for any property so handy to the Atlantic Ocean," laughed St. Maur. "In the ears of a true Englishman the Atlantic Ocean, the North Pole, and Magna Charta

sound equally imposing. I hope that the birds won't be found over wild."

"I think that if fine scenery is anything to them they'll not need to go far from their own home in search of it," said Ainlie. "Did you ever see anything finer in your life?"

"They don't make it any finer," replied St. Maur after a pause. "Yes, I shouldn't mind being the owner of the place instead of you, if only some one would keep it up for me."

The scenery from the point on the road which they had now reached was indeed magnificent. On their right there was a wood of the most majestic pines possible to imagine, and it sloped upward for a thousand feet until the topmost ridge of trees seemed like a cloud touching the clouds above. On the other side of the road that crawled up the high slope was the hollow of the valley, with the steel-grey shimmer of the little bay at the end of the lake that dwindled into the distance.

As the car jolted along the road, a splendid panorama of mountain and wood and lake was unrolled beneath the eyes of the travellers, and in the evening light it looked weirdly beautiful —so beautiful that they were both silent—speaking no word as to its beauty. Then the car entered a long natural pass with splendid high rocks on both

sides, and a noble waterfall roaring down between the steep crags to mingle with the waters of the lake that lay below.

After half an hour's enjoyment of these glories of Nature in her sublimest aspect, the car turned aside from the road into a broad avenue of elms and sycamore. The drive was a noble one, but so overgrown was it with weeds, the car seemed to be passing through a green meadow.

"This is the avenue to the Castle, I suppose?" said Ainlie to the driver.

"Thrue for you, sir; but you're not there yet," replied the man. "The drive is a good mile long still."

"The late owner doesn't seem to have spent a deal of money on the upkeep of the drive," remarked St. Maur. "What did you say his name was, Harry?"

"Mahony is his name, I believe; but as I told you, I had no dealings with him. I bought the place from the Insurance Company that held the mortgage," replied Ainlie.

"Ah, the old story," said his friend. "The land mortgaged for years, and no provision made for paying off the encumbrances, so that at last the mortgagee is forced to foreclose — I heard

this story of almost every house I saw in Ireland when I was here before."

"He belongs to the good owld stock, Mr. Mahony, and that's the truth, sir; and sorry I am this day to be dhriving a sthranger to take the place that was his by right," said the carman emphatically, giving his horse a lash with the end of the whip, which the animal politely disregarded; it seemed to understand that the blow was nothing personal, but merely the outward sign of its master's grievance.

"I can understand your feelings, and they do you credit, my good man," said Ainlie.

In dead silence the car covered the Irish mile of carriage drive, and then a sudden turn revealed the old Tower of Rathdearg Castle, and the comparatively modern residence attached to it. The house was commodious, but by no means splendid. It was not greatly dilapidated, although a window or two showed signs of standing in need of some repairs. The hall door was a high one, being plainly a part of the ancient Castle structure that had been utilized by the builders. The door stood hospitably open, and a light was burning in the hall beyond. Lights were also gleaming in some of the windows, though the night had not yet descended upon the landscape. But still there was no sign of life in the place.

The travellers jumped down when the car came to a standstill, and the driver carried their portmanteaux and gun-cases into the hall, Major Ainlie ringing the bell for the servants.

When the driver had been so liberally treated as to compel him to say, "God bless yer hon'r, and keep ye both from all harm!" St. Maur cried—

"Look here, my good fellow, will you tell us now what you meant by trying to prevent us from coming on here this evening? You know there was no difficulty in the matter."

The driver looked at him for a moment as if he was about to make some reply; but instead of doing so, he suddenly turned and ran back to his car. He had jumped up to a seat and was driving off before the young men had recovered from their surprise.

Then they looked at each other and burst out laughing.

"Well, of all the ridiculous adventures!" cried Ainlie. "Is the man a lunatic or what?"

"It's a puzzle which I give up," said St. Maur. "Take my advice and don't bother trying to find out what is meant by anything that happens in this country."

"I'll accept your instructions without a murmur," said Ainlie. "But in the meantime where are the

servants? I understood that Maguire had engaged servants. They must be somewhere about, or the lamps would not be lit."

He rang the bell half a dozen times, but its summons was disregarded. The house was in silence. The two men tramped down the long hall hailing servants who never appeared. They found their way to the dining-room—a fine apartment though rather gloomy, being panelled with old Irish bog oak. The table was laid for supper, and a tempting supper too; and a fire of great logs was smouldering in the grate.

"This looks rather more promising," said St. Maur. "Cold grouse! I ask for nothing better. By George, what a cut of salmon! And the salad! Oh, hang it all, man, there must be servants close at hand."

"So it seems to me. The fire must have been lighted not so long ago, or supplied with fresh logs at least. What on earth can be the meaning of their non-appearance?"

They strolled off to another quarter of the house and found themselves in the region of the kitchens, where one might reasonably expect to find domestics, even though they were missing elsewhere. But the kitchens were empty.

"I felt certain when we got to the kitchen that

we should find a complete congregation of retainers," said St. Maur. "There are usually a dozen of the Shaughran type to be found loafing about the premises of an Irish country house, and I understood that the kitchen was invariably full of them, especially at meal times."

"This house is an exception," said Ainlie. "It seems as if the whole staff cleared off the moment I rang the bell in the hall. Well, never mind! I suppose the explanation will come later on. Meantime we must do our best for ourselves without the aid of servants. I feel as if I should like to discover a pump in good working order, and a moderately rough towel."

"Order a pair of pumps," said St. Maur. "I'm keen for a scrub too."

"No doubt. But will you just give me a hint as to where I am to deliver your order, and to whom?" laughed Ainlie.

They went exploring, and going up the broad staircase they came upon several bedrooms and dressing-rooms. In two of them lamps were burning, and on the floors of the dressing-rooms were baths of cold water.

"Amazing!" cried Ainlie. "It seems as if we were deserted by some of the most devoted servants that could be found anywhere."

"Yes, only these are not to be found anywhere," said his friend.

"True; but that's immaterial. Their hearts are in the right place—I believe that's the thing to say when you are referring to an Irishman who has made ducks and drakes of everything. Well, take the pick of the rooms, old chap, and don't blame me because there's no one to look after you."

"I want no looking after, as you know jolly well. I'll stay where we are, if I am to have a choice of rooms. I don't see that there's much to choose between them."

"Good! Sing out when you are quite ready."

They had carried up their portmanteaux to the rooms, and in a quarter of an hour they had splashed to their hearts' content in the baths, and had changed their travelling dress.

Down through the silent house they tramped, whistling to try to dispel the gloomy effect of the silence; but they seemed only to make it the more disheartening. However, when they reached the dining-room once more, they found that the grouse were plump and well flavoured, and the salmon seemed perfection even to these salmon fishers who had been accustomed in Norway to cook their catches within an hour of taking them out of the water; and in these circumstances their feeling

of depression quickly vanished. They treated the absence of the servants as a good joke; and by the time they had lit up their cigars and had refilled their glasses with the excellent whisky which they found in the decanters on the table, they were in the best of spirits in every sense.

They had just turned their chairs to the fire and kicked the logs into a flame, when St. Maur said—

"Hallo! Some one has come into the house at last. Don't you hear something like steps in the hall?"

Ainlie listened for a few moments.

"Stealthy footsteps," he said in a whisper. "I understand what it all means: the servants did not expect us to arrive so soon, so they all went off somewhere on their own. Now they are returning. Don't make a fuss. We'll have some sport when they come to this room and find what has happened. Hush! I can hear them shuffling through the hall. They are coming here."

They remained in their chairs without a sound for some minutes; then the sound of stealthy steps was heard just outside.

The next instant the door was flung wide, and there rushed into the room a dozen men wearing

masks and carrying, some blackthorn sticks and some guns of an obsolete type.

"Hallo!" said Ainlie. "What's the meaning of this?"

"Murder's the meaning of this—murder—murder! Cover them with your guns, boys."

In an instant four gun-barrels were pointed at the two young men.

CHAPTER II

AS a rule, a man sitting comfortably with a friend by his own fire, could scarcely fail to be disconcerted by the sudden appearance of a mob of masked men more or less armed. But neither Harry Ainlie nor Algernon St. Maur gave the smallest sign of perturbation. A couple of years of activity with a fighting force in South Africa had done much to steady their nerves when it came to a matter of facing gun-barrels.

"Hallo!" said Ainlie, when he had taken another whiff of his cigar. "Hallo, don't you think that you are after making a mistake, my friend?"

He adopted the Irish idiom in speaking to the leader of the band, hoping that it would have a conciliatory effect upon him. But it seemed that his attempt in this direction was not particularly successful, for the man said—

"There's no mistake about it, sir; and wait till ye're asked before calling me your friend. No man that's an inimy to Ireland is a friend of meself."

Captain St. Maur made a motion with his cigar toward the men with the ancient guns.

"For heaven's sake put down those things," he said. "They are most dangerous things to play with. If they explode, some of you will be hurt, for sure."

"Keep the pair of them covered, boys," said the leader. "We'll soon show the interlopers that it isn't play we mean."

"What the mischief do you mean?" said Ainlie. "What do you mean by coming to my house within the first hour of my arrival in this fashion?"

"We are here because 'tis not your house, but Mr. Mahony's—him that ye've dispossessed—turning him out of the home that was his own when the people in the adjacent island of England was wandering about the woods in the skins of wild animals," cried the spokesman, taking a step forward apparently by the force of his rhetoric.

"Stand where you were, sir," said Ainlie with emphasis, and the man was so startled that he obeyed. "Now stay there," continued Ainlie. "If you come a foot nearer to me, I'll break every bone in your body. State plainly what your business is with me, if you have any business. If you have none, clear out of my house."

It was apparent that the assumption of so bold a

front by the unarmed gentlemen was startling to the others. Two or three of them went backward a few feet.

"We'll make ye sing small before we've done with ye, my gentlemen," said the spokesman with the mask. "I'm telling ye plainly that ye're the cruellest interloper of all the interlopers that ever came from England to Ireland to take over the land of the rightful owners. Every gossoon in the county Mayo knows that the Castle is owned by Mr. Mahony, as it was by his father before him, and his father's father—ay, ever since the Great Mahony took his place among the Kings at Tara. What right have ye to come here and sit in the seat of Mr. Mahony?"

"My good fellow," said Ainlie, "I know nothing about Mr. Mahony or the Kings of Ireland or the harp that once through Tara's halls—all I know is that this place was in the market for sale, and that I bought it, and that I mean to live in it for the best part of the year."

"Ye'll never live to live in it—ye'll die in it first," cried the leader of the masks. He turned to the others. "Boys, have ye cocked yer pieces? Steady with thim till I bid ye fire, and then fire like blazes. Now, sir, look an' hear. Us, the friends of Ireland and fraydom, being outraged by the cold-

blooded traffic in the homes of the thrue owld stock, has resolved to put an end to it wanst and for evermore; so we've took a sacred solemn oath to dhrive out root and branch every mother's son, let him be the highest in the land, that dares to set fut under the roof of one of the rightful owners of the country; and we're makin' a beginnin' this night. Here we are to hear ye promise and swear by all ye howlt sacred to take yerself off and peacefully surrender the home of the Mahonys to the honoured head of the family that was born and lived in Rathdearg Castle up to last year."

"Oh, is that all? Are you quite sure that you have nothing more important to say to me?" said Ainlie.

"I've said enough for ye to know that we mean business, and 'tis mighty short business ye'll find it to be if ye refuse to take the oath that we offer ye," said the man.

"You mean that it is your intention to murder us in cold blood where we sit?" said Ainlie.

"'Tis not murder—only justice to Ireland," replied the man grandly.

"Have you no sense of fair play, boys?" said Ainlie. "I ask you, if you think that it is quite fair for you to insist on my taking such an oath, considering that I paid a good price for the place?

Is it reasonable that I should see my money thrown into the sea in this fashion ? "

" Many things that don't sound fair or reasonable must be done in the sacred cause of fraydom," replied the man. " But 'tisn't for us to bandy words together at this time, 'tis for us to act, and act we will, if ye refuse to take the oath."

Major Ainlie shook his head and laid aside his cigar for a few moments.

" All I can say is, that I am greatly disappointed," he said. " I had often heard of an Irish welcome, but if this is an example of such a welcome, I don't think that it deserves all the good things I heard about it."

" Come to business, sir," cried the spokesman. " Do you mane to——"

" I spent my hard-earned money on this property —it was in the market, and if I hadn't bought it, some one else would—and I meant to spend some thousands of pounds in the neighbourhood every year, and yet——"

" 'Tis the old story of the Saxon gold that ye'd be tellin' us—holding out bribes of money to the nation that has its heart set on fraydom. But ye're too late for that tack now, sir. Ye must give us our asking at once, or we'll proceed to ackshun."

"Doesn't it strike you that you are cutting off your noses to spite your faces? And can't you see that even if I do agree to relinquish the house——"

"House! He calls Rathdearg Castle a house! Do ye mind that, boys? A house! That's more of his insults—the impidence of the foreigner that seeks to root out the good ould stock and set themselves up in their place."

"I think it's deuced hard on a chap," resumed Ainlie; and St. Maur perceived that he was talking against time, not yet having made up his mind by what means to escape from the corner in which he found himself. He remembered that when he was a boy almost every day brought tidings of outrages committed in Ireland—murders and mutilations arising out of the taking over of farms which had been the scene of evictions, and he had no reason to doubt that the criminals were of the type of the men who filled the room. St. Maur was alert, waiting for some signal from his friend. "Yes, deuced hard; for you know as well as I do that when the place is sold again——"

"'Twill never be sold again; we'll take care of that, won't we, boys?" cried the man.

"Thrue for you, Mr. Sullivan," came two or three voices.

Ainlie and his friend could scarcely keep from laughing, so easily had the men allowed the name of their leader to escape from them. But Mr. Sullivan had plainly no difficulty in suppressing his hilarity at the accident. He stamped his foot and made a few remarks in the Irish tongue that caused some of his friends to fall back a foot or two before him. He then turned in a fury upon Harry Ainlie.

"Give us yer answer, yes or no, before I count ten, or take the consequences," he shouted.

"What's left for us, the way you put it?" said Ainlie in a forlorn voice. "I suppose you won't be satisfied unless I hand you over the title-deeds of the property."

"Now we're in luck," said the man. "So ye've brought the title-deeds with ye? Ye're right. Nothing short of the title-deeds will do for us."

"Give me leave to go to my bag for them," said Ainlie, pretending to rise from his chair.

"No ye don't," cried the leader, taking a step nearer to him. "Ye must think us purty innocent to offer to go to fetch the deeds. Ye don't budge. One of us will go for the bag. What is it like, and what room is it in?"

"Just as you please," said Ainlie. "The bag is a gladstone—pigskin with a black cross stamped

on each side. It is in the room on the right at the head of the stairs."

"Peter Clancy, you know the house; fetch down that bag," said the chief of this open-hearted conspiracy of men who wore elaborate masks, and yet tossed each other's names about quite freely.

A man who carried a pole with an iron pike-head lashed to it left the room, saying—

"I'll find it, never fear."

"'Tis lucky for you that 'tis a gladstone bag ye carry," remarked the leader while they were waiting for the bag to be brought to them. "Gladstone was our friend."

But Major Ainlie had become sulky. He turned his chair round with a jerk, and St. Maur followed his example. No one in the room but St. Maur saw the glance that Ainlie had given to his friend. But the one for whom it was meant did not fail to understand all that it meant. He was alert. He saw that Ainlie had a plan that required his co-operation.

The man who had been addressed as Sullivan laughed coarsely. His bearing suggested to Ainlie that of one of the gaolers of the French Revolution—coarse, and anxious to insult.

"'Tis the Englishmen that doesn't know what good manners is," said he. "Turning their backs

on their visitors! Maybe we'll teach them manners before we've finished with them, won't we, Dougherty?"

"Maybe that, Mr. Sullivan," said one of the band.

Then the man returned with the gladstone bag. He had plainly been fumbling with the clasp, but without mastering its secret. The fact was that the bag was unlocked, but it had one of the usual spring clasps on each end, and Mr. Peter Clancy had never seen the like before.

"I can make nothing of it," said Clancy. "Maybe you can manage it, Mr. Sullivan."

Mr. Sullivan took the bag and turned it round, examining the lock. When he had tried it, and found that the bag refused to open, he handed it to Ainlie, saying grandly—

"'Tis not highway robbers that we are. Never will it be said that we didn't threat the gentlemen politely. There's yer bag, sir; get out the title-deeds for yerself and hand thim over to me."

Ainlie took the bag, saying—

"You're not so bad as you might be."

He laid it on the seat of the big easy chair and stooped over it, the broad back of the chair where he had jerked it round concealing his operations from all who were in the room. But they heard

him exclaim once or twice while he turned over the contents. At last he said to St. Maur—

"I wish you would find those deeds; you put them in the bag."

"I'll lay my hands on them in a jiffy," said St. Maur, leaving his seat and bending over the bag, turning over the contents with Ainlie.

"Have ye found them?" said Mr. Sullivan.

"Yes," said Ainlie, straightening himself behind the chair. "This is one of them, my friend has the other."

He had suddenly stretched out his right arm over the back of the chair, and Mr. Sullivan found himself within three feet of the barrel of a highly polished revolver.

In precisely the same position at the back of the other chair stood Captain St. Maur. He was covering in turn each of the men who held the guns.

"These are my title deeds, Mr. Sullivan," said Ainlie. "Put up your hands, you rascal, or I'll riddle your carcase. Drop those sticks before I count three. Captain St. Maur, choose your men. One—two——"

There was a rattle of blackthorns on the oak floor, and every man held up his hands—Mr. Sullivan held his higher than any one in the room; that was only reasonable; was he not the leader?

The men with the ancient guns, though not specified in the order given by Ainlie, seemed to be under the impression that it was pure inadvertence on his part to omit them; they only made a momentary pause; then one of them saw that Captain St. Maur was covering him very carefully. He dropped his weapon with a clash, and the others followed his example. None of the guns exploded; the only mishap was that the barrel of one parted from the stock by the concussion.

And there stood Major Ainlie, his shoulders and the hand that held the revolver only appearing above the top of his chair, and his friend in precisely the same position.

The whole change in the scene occupied something less than half a minute; but it was a very complete change.

"Well, Mr. Sullivan, I hope you are satisfied with my title deeds," said Ainlie. "If you are not, don't hesitate to say so. You're not what I would call a shy man, Mr. Sullivan, where any talking is needed. But all the same, you look the biggest fool in this crowd. What, man, do you suppose that men like Captain St. Maur and myself have been fighting the cunningest people on the face of the earth for the past three years to no purpose? We fought the Boers in South Africa with every second man on

our side an Irishman, I'm proud to say, and you and your dupes actually believed that you could get the better of us! Why, Mr. Sullivan, I have seen four distinct ways of wiping you off the face of the earth during the past five minutes; and it was only the recollection of my brave Irish comrades in South Africa that made me spare you. Captain St. Maur had half a dozen tricks, any one of which would have floored you. I will not insult Mr. Mahony by suggesting that he knew anything of this business of yours. An Irish gentleman is a gentleman, and they don't make better in any part of the world. We know all about you, Mr. Sullivan. You threatened the servants that Mr. Maguire had got for me, forcing them to leave the house just before we arrived, so that the place might be clear for you to—to make infernal fools of yourselves; but—hallo! Is that the servants come back?"

There was the noise of tramping feet in the hall.

Down went Mr. Sullivan on his knees, his hands clasped appealingly in front of him.

"For the sake of all ye hold dear, don't be too hard on us, yer hon'r," he gasped. "We'll swear to do anything that you bid us, only spare us for the sake of all the saints in hiven. That's the polis outside, and 'tis five years that we'll get, every

mother's son of us. But ye'll have mercy on us poor men—you'll——"

The door was flung open, exposing a dozen men in dark uniform holding short rifles and showing a certain amount of alertness in the way they brought the weapons into a position of attack.

An officer, with his sword drawn and a revolver in his spare hand, was the first to enter, a gentleman in a tweed suit was the last.

Ainlie and St. Maur laid their weapons on the seats of the chairs. The constabulary officer took in the situation at a glance.

"We are in time, Mr. Maguire," he said to the gentleman in tweed.

"Ay, just in time," said the one whom he had addressed.

"Yes; but if you had come a little earlier you would have given us a chance of doing you better. Still, there is a grouse or two left, and a few pounds of salmon and plenty of good whisky," said Ainlie.

"Arrest the lot of them," said the constabulary officer with a motion in the direction of the masked men. But before any of the police had taken a step to carry out the order, Ainlie said—

"Hallo! What is the meaning of this? Why should any of my friends be arrested? You have made a mistake somewhere, sir. These good

fellows are my guests this evening. I am offering them a drink—a poor return for the trouble they have taken in coming here to give me a true Irish welcome. Oh, yes; I know Sullivan; and Peter Clancy—ah, Peter Clancy is the broth of a boy! Surely Dougherty should be here too. Come to the front, friend Dougherty, and show yourself."

The officer seemed puzzled. He looked at Major Ainlie, then he surveyed the men whom he had meant to arrest, and finally he spoke a word or two to the gentleman in tweed. The last-named came forward.

"My name is Maguire," he said.

"I am glad to meet you, after our long correspondence," said Ainlie, shaking hands with him. "Do have something to drink, Mr. Maguire. We have much to talk about. You took a great deal of trouble on my behalf. You had a lot of difficulty about the servants, I'm sure."

"I think we should decide about these fellows first," said Maguire. "Are you serious in not wishing them to be arrested? We heard all about this affair, but unfortunately only an hour ago."

"I'm quite serious. I look upon them as my guests," said Ainlie. "If the police officer thinks it his duty to arrest any of them, he may do so

on his own responsibility. I give him my word that I shall refuse to appear to prosecute."

The police officer scowled. Then he laughed.

"I'm not sure that you haven't hit upon the best way of dealing with them, Major Ainlie," he said in a confidential tone. "After all——"

"Quite so. That's what I say, 'after all——'" laughed Ainlie. "You see, sir, I have had a good many Irishmen to deal with in South Africa during the past few years, and I came to know something of how this particular race should be treated, if you want to get on with them." Then he turned to the men, saying—

"Boys, I'm glad that you came to see me this evening; it has given us an opportunity of knowing each other thoroughly. I hope that the past half-hour has made every mother's son of you understand the way I mean to go on so long as I am among you. Now, good night to you."

Then came cries of "Long life to yer hon'r!" "Good luck to ye, sir!" "We'll stand by ye afther this night!" "If we'd known that ye was a thrue gintleman——"

"Oh, yes; I've heard that kind of thing before," said Ainlie with another laugh. "Off you go!"

Several of the band had passed through the door between the constabulary and their handy

little rifles. But just as the one named Sullivan was passing out, Ainlie cried—

"Oh, by the way, Mr. Sullivan, I don't wish you to go just yet. I have a few words to say to you before you leave."

The man was plainly surprised. He gasped.

"A word wid me, yer hon'r?" he stammered.

"Just a word. You needn't look at the police. I promise you that there will be no question of arresting you."

Major Ainlie then had a chat with the constabulary officer, asking him to drop in to lunch the next day with Mr. Maguire, and in a few minutes the room contained only Ainlie, St. Maur, and Sullivan.

"Now, sir," said the first named, "take off that mask and let us see the face that you're ashamed of." The man obeyed mechanically, and the face that he revealed was that of the lowest type of Irishman—small and with cunning eyes. Ainlie looked at him.

"You are the most rascally-looking vermin I have come across for a long time," said he with contempt in every word. "I know exactly what you did in this affair. You would have killed me, as I doubt not you did many a better man in the old days. Now, Mr. Sullivan, I'm going to teach

you a lesson. Here's a five-pound note—enough to take you out of the country to-morrow; but before you go—pick up one of those blackthorns that your dupes left as a keepsake—pick one up, I say!"

"What for, sir?"

"To have a friendly bout with me before you leave. I choose this one. Now, if you don't want me to beat you within an inch of your life, you will do well to defend yourself."

The man spat on his hand and clenched his teeth, grasping his stick as one accustomed to fight with such a weapon. The cruel look of a wild animal was in his eyes as he made a savage rush at his opponent. He never touched him. The two sticks met in the air. He pulled himself together for another rush; but when he made it Ainlie took a step to one side at the last moment, and opened his cheek by a saw-like stroke of his thorn. Another moment and Ainlie had swung his stick like a flail upon his left arm. Sullivan gave a yell like that of a wild cat, and like a wild cat sprang at his opponent, using his stick as a lance and aiming at Ainlie's body. Ainlie easily avoided his attack, and Sullivan found himself on the floor with his face smashed beyond the need for a mask to conceal his identity from his most intimate

friends. He lay blinded by his blood, cursing and shrieking.

"I'm kilt! I'm kilt dead."

"No, you're nothing of the sort," said Ainlie, catching him by the collar and setting him on his feet. "Now, take all that remains of your dirty carcase out of this house to-night, and out of Ireland to-morrow. As surely as you are in the country to-morrow night so surely will I have you arrested. Out you go!"

Mr. Sullivan limped to the door.

CHAPTER III

MR. MAGUIRE was the young man who had acted as agent for Major Ainlie in the purchase of Rathdearg Castle and all the fishing and shooting rights that went with the property. He had also engaged the servants and made rather hurried arrangements for the arrival of the new owner and his friend. St. Maur had become acquainted with Maguire during a previous visit to the neighbourhood, and had strongly recommended him to Ainlie as a most competent man and one who was very popular with all classes.

He paid his promised visit to the Castle the next day, bringing with him Mr. Singer, the Constabulary officer. Both these gentlemen were highly diverted by the shillelagh duel with Sullivan—which, by the way, they had witnessed through one of the windows.

"My dear sir," said the officer, "you do not suppose that I did not know that something of that sort was in the air? I saw by the look on your face when you told that rascal to remain that you

meant to give him the finest hiding he ever had in his life, and as I've been longing for the past year to hide him myself, the temptation to watch the job being done was too much for me."

"I suppose that next to the pleasure of hiding a rascal yourself is watching another man do it for you," remarked St. Maur.

"The most satisfactory reflection of all is that the rascal has had his hiding, no matter who did it," said Maguire. "No one in the county is sorry that Sullivan got his beauty spoilt. He is a pig buyer in a small way, and I know for certain that he is a moneylender also on a small scale—that is to say, his loans are on a small scale, but not his interest. You hit the nail on the head when you treated him as responsible for the whole business."

"I don't know about the 'nail,'" said Ainlie.

"In the absence of the nail you were safe in aiming at Sullivan's," said St. Maur.

"The story of his licking will be all over the county by this evening," said Maguire. "I doubt if the place wouldn't be made too hot to hold him, even if you hadn't bound him down to clear off without delay."

"Of course, it is not to be thought of for a moment that Mr. Mahony would have any sympathy with those idiots who visited me to avenge

the wrong I have done to him in buying the Castle from the people to whom he had mortgaged it," said Ainlie.

"He's a bit sore about the sale of the old place, as you can easily understand," said Maguire; "but you may be perfectly certain that he would be stronger than any man in the county in his abuse of Sullivan and his gang for their outrage. I don't say, mind, that he doesn't look on you as an interloper; and I certainly wouldn't suggest that you need expect him to ask you to dinner all at once; but you may be sure that any resentment he may feel will stop there."

"But why should he bear me any grudge?" asked Ainlie. "The place was bound to be sold, and why should the buyer be thought an interloper? If you sell a dogcart, you don't have your back set up against the chap who buys it."

"I'm afraid that the Irish are a bit unreasonable in the matter of the sale of their ancestral homes," said Maguire. "I suppose it is that all the confiscations of the past, called by an obliging figure of speech 'settlements,' produced such an impression upon the people that their descendants have come to think of a simple act of purchase of property, when it entails the removal of a family, as a confiscation. Mr. Mahony is, I know, a little

touchy on the subject of the foreclosure of the mortgages. He seems to think that the insurance company who had them should have let them run on indefinitely without the payment of the interest."

"Poor old chap! Maybe he has had a large and expensive family," said St. Maur.

"He has a son and daughter only; the existence of the former was enough to account for the non-payment of the mortgage interest for a good many years," said Maguire. "He was one of those most hopeless persons—the man whose worst enemy is himself. What between the race-horses of the father and the senseless extravagance of the son, the marvel is that anything whatever is left for the girl to live on."

"I suppose they left the neighbourhood when the crash came?" said Ainlie.

"Oh, dear, no!" replied Maguire. "Mr. Mahony and his daughter live in a picturesque cottage at the head of the lough; the son is, I believe, in some colony, and beginning to do very well for himself now that he has no one to supply him with ready cash. It would be a lonely enough life for the girl were she not so great a friend of the Wallands. She occasionally pays them long visits, and they take her about."

"Do you mean the Wallands of Undercliffe, in Dorset?" asked Ainlie.

"The same. They have been very kind to her. I dare say you have come across them in London," said Maguire.

"I have met them several times. The last time was at Ranelagh. They had a party at a table next to mine one Sunday in May," said Ainlie.

The conversation then drifted into other topics, such as the likelihood of the birds turning out wild, and the possibility of the salmon river remaining unpoached for another month. But when his visitors had taken their departure, Harry Ainlie became thoughtful for some time, sitting in a chair at one of the windows in the castle that commanded a magnificent view of the mountains that surrounded the still lake—of the distant lough with its splendid cliffs rising almost sheer from the water, which reflected—though Ainlie was too far away to be aware of this—every peak and headland out to the Atlantic. It would have seemed to any one who had seen him that he had fallen into a reverie over the Irish question, or some equally insoluble problem, so abstracted had he become while letting his eyes roam through all the wonders of the landscape. But no one was present to see him. St. Maur had gone off with the police officer to the

village to interview an old man who had the reputation for making a salmon-fly that was practically irresistible to the fish in the river in the autumn season; so that no one saw how Ainlie had given himself up to the solution of whatever question he had in his mind; and no one saw how he jumped from his seat at last, saying—

"It would be impossible—quite impossible! The Wallands have friends by the score, and they drive them nearly every Sunday to Ranelagh. I have seen them there half a dozen times. What rot of me to think that because . . . Well, if it should turn out so, what would happen? Ah, that's the question—what would happen? Heaven knows! Well, I'll jolly soon come to know all there is to be known about the matter."

He lit a fresh cigar, and his thoughts went back once more to the Sunday when he had dined at Ranelagh three months before. He had had a small party with him, but a much larger party was at the table next to his. The Wallands were well-known society people, who were invariably to be found taking part in any function that was really fashionable. They were said to be enormously wealthy, and thus no one who knew anything was surprised when the heads of certain great historic families "took them up"; the duchesses—except

those who come from the United States—have always shown themselves very liberal-minded in the matter of taking up young women whose fathers esteem it a privilege to pay their Bridge debts; and it was rumoured that the Walland girls paid their gambling debts in cash, and, what was considered better still, did not insist on the duchesses whom they visited doing the same.

These were the people who had a party beside him on that fine Sunday in May, and among the women portion there was a girl who had attracted him greatly, not merely because she contrasted so greatly with the Walland girls, who were quite commonplace, but because her face represented an ideal about which he had dreamed in his boyhood, and to which he had been faithful ever since. She had dark hair, and the very darkest eyes he had ever seen, but they were not fiercely dark, like the eyes of a Spanish woman; they were, he thought, mournfully dark, with long lashes. Her face had, indeed, more than a suggestion of mournfulness in its expression, but occasionally it became illuminated, and for a short space it was even merry. He thought he liked it least at such times; though it was still more beautiful than any face he had ever seen.

Now, as he remained seated at the window of

his castle, he recalled how he had been so absorbed through watching that girl that he had become almost neglectful of the guests at his own table, and one of them—a lady—had made a happy little jest of it. This had caused him to pull himself together for the rest of the dinner; but he had not forgotten to follow the girl with his eyes when she rose with her friends and went outside to hear the band play. He had noticed that she was tall and slender, though scarcely what one would call thin. Her figure was exquisite, and she moved like a young goddess, gracefully and easily.

The lady beside him at his table had said—

"What a beautiful creature! I wonder where the Wallands picked her up?"

Some one else at the table mentioned that she was no newly-made discovery. She had been several times in their company during the season, and once at Prince's in the winter.

Of course, he pretended to be only languidly interested in the girl, and the conversation drifted off to such commonplace topics as the coming polo match, and the Eton and Harrow cricket. But Ainlie had felt so greatly interested in the girl whom he had seen that he had in a confidential moment told his friend Algy St. Maur about her, and his friend had accepted his confidence in the

usual spirit in which such confessions are received. He had whistled like a starling, and had quoted (incorrectly) a line or two of Byron; he bade Ainlie to cheer up; he even went so far as to promise to find out from one of the Wallands who this special girl was who had been dining with them at Ranelagh; but when Ainlie asked him a fortnight later if he had done so, he found that St. Maur had forgotten all about the matter.

Then it so happened that St. Maur had gone to pay a visit to his people in Westmoreland, so that even if he had remembered his promise, he had no opportunity of keeping it.

And now Harry Ainlie sat by that window wondering if it could be possible that the daughter of the late owner of Rathdearg Castle was the girl whom he had seen during that memorable dinner at Ranelagh—the girl who might often have sat in the window where he sat, looking out upon the same landscape.

The conclusions to which he came, after giving the matter all his attention, were, first, that he was certainly in love with that girl, and, secondly, that it was ridiculous to suppose that she should be identical with the daughter of Mr. Mahony. The Wallands had scores of girls staying with them in the course of a year; and why should he be

foolish enough even to consider the possibility of the girl being Miss Mahony? Maguire, in referring to Miss Mahony, had said nothing about her being beautiful; now surely, if she were the one on whom his thoughts were dwelling, the agent would have said at least a word in praise of her beauty.

He felt quite sentimentally mournful for a while over this conclusion; and he failed to cheer himself by the reflection that it was just as well that the young women were not the same. Where should he be, he asked himself, if the girl of whom he was thinking, and of whom he felt he would never cease to think, if she turned out to be the daughter of the man who bore a grudge against him for having purchased the Castle? Yes, it was just as well that the girls were separate and distinct persons. And then he laughed, thinking how amusing it would be if he were to find out that the daughter of Mr. Mahony was a young lady of thirty-five or forty summers, with enormous feet and hands, and a figure made to match!

He was still smiling when St. Maur returned. He had had a long stroll, he said, to the village of Ballydearg; and he had found the man who made the celebrated salmon-flies to be a most interesting old fellow, with no end of stories of

the neighbourhood—legends of the castle and legends of the lough. Was Ainlie aware, he asked, that he had purchased with the castle one of the active and faithful banshees known to fame? Well, it was a fact. There were numbers of excellent witnesses still alive who were ready to testify to the accuracy of the banshee's warnings. Her wail had been heard when Mr. Mahony's father had died, and so it had been when any misfortune was about to fall on the family.

"For instance, the purchase of the ancestral home by a miserable Saxon with some money?" suggested Ainlie.

"Well, she was heard to wail when the mortgagees foreclosed," said St. Maur. "I suppose the banshee goes with the property."

"We shall train her to wail for us just as she did for the original inhabitants," said Ainlie.

"Hang it all, man, you don't buy a banshee as you would a watch-dog," said St. Maur.

"I suppose not," said Ainlie. "Did you hear anything more of local interest?"

"Oh, yes; there is the legend of the lough," replied St. Maur. "I feel myself in the position of the operatic tenor coming forward to the footlights to sing the 'Legend of the Lough,' while the orchestra makes weird music and the violins

go pizzicato. What is the name of the Johnnie in 'Lohengrin' who does something of the sort?"

"Let me suggest that his name was Lohengrin."

"I fancy you are right. Never mind. The legend of Lough Garrib according to Mr. Muldoon, the salmon-fly maker, is as follows: Tum-tum-tiddy-dum—dum-dum-tiddy—that's the orchestra playing the prelude."

"Your imitation is marvellous! I fancy that I hear Covent Garden at its best."

"You can—with imagination. Well, it happened about a thousand years ago, more or less, when Ireland was the most highly civilized place in the world. Yes, it must have been quite a thousand years ago. There were princes in the land in those days, and a castle or two. There was one here where this modern structure—it's only six hundred years old, Muldoon says—stands at present; and another was built to command the one landing-place at the end of the lough, for, according to Muldoon, there was quite a brisk trade done in piracy off the west coast."

"The pirates lay in wait for the Atlantic liners, no doubt. I have often thought that a modern pirate who knew his business could make a nice haul

for himself by boarding an Atlantic liner coming from New York with a cargo of millionaires."

"And you would suggest the purchase of your castle for the defence of the pass against the victorious hordes? I don't believe that your scheme would come to anything."

"Perhaps I am over sanguine. Go on with your legend. Where does the tenor solo come in?"

"He came in at the head of his clan, who lived more or less precariously in the county Galway, and he landed at the end of Lough Garrib one fine night, and made an attempt to take the castle by storm. It seems that his clan had an ancient feud with the King of Mayo, and hoped to pay him out by capturing one stronghold after another. It so happened, however, that his first attempt was unfortunate. The garrison of the castle on the cliffs above the landing-place had their eyes open, and seeing the galley of the young chief approaching, met him on the beach, and a brisk fight was the result. In spite of his impudence, which, of course, his friends and the bards who tell the tale called bravery, he was taken prisoner, and his companions were driven back to their ship, leaving the beach strewn with the bodies of the slain."

"There's not much that sounds attractive in all

this. I'd choose a lively musical comedy for preference any day."

"But I've only given you the beginning of the piece. The tenor hasn't had a chance yet, and what about the soprano?"

"That's just what I was asking myself. Well, they took the young desperado prisoner? That was a step in the right direction. They put out his eyes, I suppose. That was the first thing they did with their illustrious prisoners in those good old days?"

"They did nothing of the sort. They only immured him—that's the right word, I believe—immured him, in a small room in the castle and locked the door, leaving him to starve to death. It so happened, however, that the young man was a lover, and, as is usual in that case, there was a beautiful young woman mixed up in the business. She was devoted to him, as he was to her; and hearing of his mishap and of the benevolent intentions of his captors, she put off in a small boat one dark night and, single-handed, sailed up the lough and landed unnoticed by any one. Climbing up the steep rocks she sang, after the good old fashion, a ballad of which her lover was passionately fond, beneath the iron-grated window of his dungeon. This attracted his attention."

"I had a notion that it would if she kept at it long enough. But how about the other people in the castle? I wonder if their attention would not also be attracted by the singing?"

"They would fancy it was the cry of a sea-bird—they always did in the best legends. Anyhow, the young chief heard, and replied by singing the last verse, just to tell her that he was there. He came to the barred window and had a conversation with the girl. She had brought a loaf of bread and a bottle of wine with her, and throwing a stone with a line attached through his window, he hauled up the lot. Every night for a week she did the same; and then it occurred to her that if she could send him up a file, he might contrive to cut through his iron bars and so escape. She did so, and they appointed a night when he was to leave his prison and join her. But unhappily their plans were frustrated by the Prince of Garrib, who was also in love with the girl. She arrived in her boat all right and, climbing up the cliffs, gave the signal. She saw her lover appear in the moonlight at the dungeon window, and the bars had been removed. 'All is well,' she whispered, 'my boat will bear us to happiness.' Then her lover put his head out of the window and his body followed. There fell at her feet the dead body of the young chief. He had

been slain by his enemies, who had learned of her devotion, and they had flung his body out to her. With a shriek she fell upon the body and covered his face with kisses. But when the wicked Prince appeared to witness the success of his grim jest she rose, and suffered him to put an arm about her. Then, without a moment's warning, she flung him and herself over the cliffs. His mangled body was found the next day; hers was never found, but it is said that on moonlight nights the spectre of a beautiful girl has been seen climbing the cliffs from a boat, bearing food for a spectral lover who awaits her coming."

"A perfect legend of the true Irish type," cried Ainlie. "We'll take a stroll to the cliffs after dinner, and who knows what may happen?"

"I'm your man," said St. Maur.

It was in splendid moonlight that they started for the cliffs. The mountains stood out black against the background of the sky which overflowed with silver light. The way to the termination of that long and narrow lough, which could be seen shining in the distance, was along the base of the hills. At one place the mountains put their shoulders so close together that the pass between them was not more than twenty feet wide; and here, of course, the night was black. Emerging

from this place of gloom, they walked beneath a towering hill-slope clad with small firs almost to the very summit, and, rounding this, they found themselves looking down upon the moving waters with the sound of the far-off Atlantic billows in their ears.

When they had walked on to the brink of the cliffs they looked over, and saw the waves like molten silver, two hundred feet below; but further away there was a broad patch of yellow beach, and a tiny natural harbour.

"That must have been where the hapless girl landed," said St. Maur; "but how she found her way up these cliffs——"

"H'sh!" said Ainlie, catching him by the arm. "H'sh. There's a boat landing below, and——"

"By George, the girl is there too," said St. Maur in a whisper.

They took a step into the shadow of a great crag and peered over the brink of the cliffs. A small boat lay moored to a rock in the natural harbour below, and out of it sprang a girl with a string of trout dangling from one hand. She made her way quite easily up the narrow track that zigzagged among the cliffs, sometimes disappearing behind the rugged face of a crag, and then coming into view again on the track beyond.

She reached the summit and walked quickly away through the moonlight in the direction of a small house, which they had passed on the road a few minutes before.

"The spectre! And what a spectre!" said St. Maur when she was out of sight.

"Algy, that is the girl who was with the Wallands at Ranelagh," said Ainlie.

"Nonsense! Are you sure?"

"Sure?" Ainlie laughed in his own way.

CHAPTER IV

THEY watched the girl walking through the moonlight to the house—it was something more than a cottage—and when she had gone through the entrance gate, they looked at one another and laughed—at least one of them laughed; the other was in no mood for laughter.

"By all the powers in Ireland, if that is the girl you talked about, she is worth it!" said St. Maur. "Making allowance for the glamour of moonlight and the romance of the situation and the legend that occupied our minds, she is still the most beautiful creature I have ever seen."

"You think so?" said Ainlie grimly.

"Think so? Good heavens, man, have you lost your eyes?" cried St. Maur.

"No; it is not my eyes that I have lost," said Ainlie.

"Hard hit! There's no doubt that you're hard hit," said St. Maur, looking at him critically. "Well, whoever she may be, you're in luck. Fancy

coming across the Channel, and finding your goddess living next door to you! Faith, you are in luck, my lad."

"Am I?" said Ainlie. "She is the daughter of Mr. Mahony, whom I turned out of his home."

St. Maur gave a long whistle.

"How do you know that she is Miss Mahony?" he asked.

"Maguire told me that Mr. Mahony's daughter would have had a dull time if she were not a great friend of the Wallands. That set me thinking while you were at the village, if it could be possible that she was the girl I had seen at the Wallands' table at Ranelagh."

"And, of course, you came to the conclusion that it was impossible? That's why it turns out that she is," said St. Maur. "That's where your luck comes in."

"My luck? I don't see it just at this moment."

"Why, what more could you wish for?—tell me that. Doesn't she live next door to you, and do you fancy that the romantic elements in the business count for nothing in a girl's eyes? Harry, my lad, you may have one of the most entertaining months of your life."

"Entertaining? I don't know what you mean by entertaining."

"'There's nothing half so sweet in life.'"

"Don't fancy for a moment that either father or daughter has forgiven me for turning them out of their home."

"Lord, man, what rot! If you hadn't bought the place——"

"Oh, yes, that's the way *we* look at it; but the question is, how will a high-spirited, thoroughly unreasonable Irish gentleman look at the business? I had a suspicion of how it would be when I suggested it to Maguire; he admitted that Mr. Mahony felt strongly that I was an interloper."

"Could any man be such a fool?"

"Why not? I'm not an Irishman, and yet I feel pretty sure that I should think that any one who bought my house over my head and packed me off to wherever I chose to go was a confounded interloper. People may talk as they please about a transaction in the open market and so forth—they may ask why the man mortgaged his place—why he didn't pay the interest on the mortgage when it was due—all these would be perfectly reasonable questions; but asking them would in no way alter the aspects of this particular case. The man would not feel the less sore at being turned out of his house, and he would not feel that the new-comer was a bit less of an interloper."

"I suppose not. And this means that men are mostly fools."

"It means that men have feelings that are stronger than arguments."

"Then you had better take steps to restore the castle to the sentimental gentleman who mortgaged it up to the truck of the flag pole on the turret. Drop him a line to-morrow, or call in with me now when we're passing, and inquire when it will suit him to return. That would settle the business."

"Would it? My dear Algy, the man would kick me out of his house if I were to suggest such a thing."

"Then what the mischief does he want?"

"If you could answer that question you would be the greatest statesman in England. They have all been trying to answer the question of what Irishmen want for the past two hundred years."

"Then you think that Mr. Mahony looks on you as a miserable interloper, and yet if you were to try to make restitution for your interloping, he would ask you if you thought him a pauper, coming to him with your confounded offers of handing him over a house that he could not pay for?"

"You have hit off the situation to a nicety. And now you will see why I don't consider myself to be quite so lucky as I might be."

"You mean to say that you——"

"Yes, I do mean to say that I have never seen a girl that I would name in the same breath as this one; and if I can't manage to——"

"Oh, Lord, has it come to that? I fancied that you were thinking of a comfortable month's flirtation. I'm sorry for you, Harry, old chap; but I'm a deal sorrier for myself. I didn't bargain for this when I said I'd come across the Channel with you for your shoot in the wilds of the west. A chap so far gone as you are isn't invariably the liveliest of pals."

"Oh, hang it all, man; I'm not so bad as all that. You'll stand by me, won't you?"

Captain St. Maur laughed.

"I've stood by you once or twice before now," he said. "We had a pretty stiff hour together in Eland's Kloof, hadn't we?"

"And in the Karoo—you stood by me then, old chap, and I'll trust you to do the same here," said Ainlie.

"I'll see you through, never fear," said St. Maur. "Whatever happens, it can't be worse than Eland's Kloof."

They had some further conversation on the subject of Irish pride in connection with Irish poverty before they set out to return to the castle.

But when they were passing the house to which they had seen the girl go, they were silent. This house was a very humble one compared with Rathdearg Castle, but it was far more than a cottage, and its situation was as picturesque as poet or patriot could desire. Even from the road at this place the full length of the narrow, sinuous lough, so like a Norwegian fjord with its precipitous cliffs on each side, was visible. It glittered in the moonlight between the headlands at the entrance as though the Atlantic was washing shells of gold between the cliffs to mingle with the shells of the little beach that curved at the meeting-place of the two precipitous sides.

The mountain slope above the house was covered with small pines, and the moonlight, touching the branches, gave the whole hillside the aspect of being clothed with a dark velvet mantle.

"Any one who wants a more picturesque house would be hard to please," said St. Maur.

Ainlie was silent. What was in his mind at that moment was that he would be quite willing to let Mr. Mahony go back to his castle if only he would exchange for it this house and all that it contained.

St. Maur, who was anxious to get among the salmon of the river with as little delay as possible,

thought that it was rather unfair of his friend to make no move in the same direction. The next day was an excellent salmon day—grey and mild. The fish would rise at anything, he said. But Ainlie was not of this disposition. He did not rise to St. Maur's suggestion that if there was a twenty-four pounder anywhere about it would run a very good chance of being hooked before night.

"My dear Algy, I want to have this other thing settled as soon as possible," said he.

"What do you mean by the other thing?" growled Algy.

"Oh, you know well enough," said Ainlie. "I'm a selfish beast, I admit; but—well, I have been thinking over a plan—a trick, if you wish——"

"I have no wish in the matter, I assure you; don't take me into consideration in the matter at all," said St. Maur, with a shrug.

"Have I shown any disposition to do so up to the present?" said Ainlie.

"To do you justice, you have not," said St. Maur, laughing in spite of his grumbling. "Well, what is your trick, your plan, or whatever you choose to call it, and where do you expect it to land you?"

"To land me? Your heart is given over to the salmon, so much is clear," said Ainlie.

"And yours is—well, never mind. When I crossed the Channel I came with a reasonable—a moderately reasonable chap; I had no notion that before we should be here a whole day he would develop into just the opposite—a lover. But out with your scheme."

"You see, I wish to learn as soon as possible what the attitude of Mr. Mahony is in regard to myself."

"This is the first time that I ever heard of a prospective father-in-law being put in the position of stating what are his intentions. Isn't it usually the other way about?"

"It is all very well for Maguire to say that he looks on me as an interloper. Mr. Mahony may be much less unreasonable."

"I have always found it safer to assume that a man will be more, rather than less, unreasonable. Don't forget that when I hinted yesterday at Mr. Mahony's possible hostility to you being a bit ridiculous, you took his part and said that you could understand him, and that he was quite right."

"I don't go back on that; but I must find out at first hand what he thinks of me."

"Go to him, and ask him what he thinks of you."

"That's just what I mean to do."

"Nonsense! Oh, you must be wanting badly to see her again."

"So I am. But I think I know of a way to learn how the land lies. I have a notion of going to him without letting him know who I am."

"More romance! I never fancied that romance was so catching as it seems to be. The effect of being in a romantic locality is more ruinous to one's character for straightforwardness than sleeping in a swamp is to a chap with a tendency to the ague shakes. Are you going to send for a false beard and whiskers, with a wig to match?"

"Don't play the giddy zebra. Listen while I unfold my little plan, and tell me what you think of it."

"If you mean me to be straightforward just say so."

"There's no need for you to go so much out of your usual course. I mean to carry out my plan whatever you may say against it."

"Now we understand each other. I'm ready for your revelations."

It did not take Ainlie long to unravel the scheme which he had devised to enable him to learn what Mr. Mahony thought of the "interloper" who occupied the castle of his ancestors and—what was

more important—to bring him into the presence of Miss Mahony.

When St. Maur heard it he shook his head disparagingly.

"I can't see how it could possibly work," he said. "I can see how you get there, but I can't see how you are to get out of it. I don't think that it is worthy of a student of Sherlock Holmes or Baden-Powell."

"I'll take my chance of something turning up should the worst come to the worst."

"Should the best come to the best, you mean."

"Do I?"

"Certainly you do. It will be most awkward for you if you find that Mr. Mahony is friendly, and I can't imagine that he will be different. You'd look a bit queer when he came to call upon you."

Ainlie looked grave.

"There's something in what you say," he remarked. "I'm afraid that in such a case I should be forced to crawl down. Never mind. I'm ready to run the risk. I think we may depend on his being thoroughly nasty."

"He'll be a deuced deal nastier if he finds out that you have imposed upon him."

"Not he; he's an Irishman. If he tells me that

he considers the new owner of the castle an upstart and an interloper, that will be because he is a true Irishman, and I'm ready to trust to his being an Irishman to forgive my trick."

"I believe that you are half an Irishman yourself, or you wouldn't be so ready to adopt a harum-scarum scheme like this," said St. Maur. "By George, it is as I say; it's a matter of atmosphere, and it was commented on four hundred years ago: Englishmen coming to Ireland become more Irish than the Irish themselves."

"I'm ready to meet them half-way," laughed Ainlie. "Come on now, and lend a hand at composing a letter—it must be a masterpiece of diplomatic wording. I don't feel equal to it single-handed."

They sat down, and between them composed a letter of marvellous subtlety (as they thought) addressed to Mr. Mahony by his "Ever faithfully, H. de Courcy Ainlie." It ran thus:—

"RATHDEARG CASTLE,
"*Thursday.*

"My dear Sir,

"Learning by accident that it is my privilege to have you as a neighbour, I take the liberty to beg of you to honour me by con-—

tinuing to fish in the river and to shoot over the mountain. I should indeed feel humiliated if you were to fancy that I should regard the accident of my residence in this place as absorbing all the privileges which have been enjoyed by your family for centuries. I venture to write to you at this time only to assure you that I recognize that there are certain rights which I consider superior to all laws, and assuredly the most sacred are those that have been inherited by the representative of the great family of which you are the head.

"Allow me to remain, my dear Sir,

"Yours ever faithfully,

"H. DE COURCY AINLIE."

"I consider it a masterpiece," said St. Maur.

"It is little inferior to anything that Machiavelli ever produced," said Ainlie, looking at the letter critically.

"If old Mahony takes offence at that, we may give him up," said St. Maur.

The next morning this letter was being borne along the road to the lough by a young man wearing the ordinary corduroys and rough gaiters of a gamekeeper. His face was bronzed like that of a gamekeeper, and he wore a small black mous-

tache. His eyelashes were also black, although his hair was inclined to be fair.

When this young man left the castle, Major Ainlie was nowhere to be seen; but St. Maur was at hand, and he gave him an encouraging pat on the back, saying—

"Deliver that letter, my man, and don't stand gossiping with the servant girls, or I'll give you a month's notice. Do you hear?"

"I hear, sir," rejoined the man, touching his cap. "But give me leave to remind you, sir, that I'm not your keeper, but another gentleman's. If you should ever need a keeper, I would humbly recommend you to apply to a second-rate lunatic asylum—the sort of keeper you'll need is the sort that they'll supply you with. Good morning, sir."

"You are the most insolent fellow I ever met," said St. Maur. "I would kick you off the grounds if I were not perfectly sure that Mr. Mahony will kick you off his—yes, like a football."

The young man deliberately picked up a large-sized pebble and shied it at Captain St. Maur, at which that officer, who had received the D.S.O. on leaving South Africa, ignominiously retreated behind a large shrub, and from this cover sent forth a torrent of abuse against the young man—a pro-

ceeding that would have seemed to any critical onlooker singularly wanting in dignity. But, for that matter, the behaviour of the young keeper would have seemed quite outrageous to even the least critical of all observers.

He, however, appeared to be quite satisfied with himself as he swung along the road to the coast whistling something from the latest musical comedy. The morning was a fine one, and the air was full of the fresh scents of the mountain heather that swept down through the broad spaces between the slopes. But mingling with the perfume from the mountains there came at intervals a misty breath from the Atlantic. It came with an occasional wisp of mist that whirled for a few moments around the neck of the mountain peaks and then withered into nothing.

"What a day!" cried the young man. "And they said it never ceased raining in this part of Ireland! What liars there are in this world—I shouldn't wonder if they were to be found even in Ireland. A day that makes one glad to be alive. It seems a pity to run the chance of making one wish that one were dead—going on this errand. I can't see why I should hurry. He may kick me out. It's all a question of temper—and temperament."

His steps became gradually slower until at last he came to a standstill. He mused for some moments irresolutely on the roadside, and apparently as a result he jumped across the ditch and took about a score of steps up the purple slope which curved upward from the roadside, and threw himself down on a bed of heather, sweet-scented and springy. He pulled the peak of his cap over his eyes, and lay there as though he were his own master—as though he had no duty to perform—as though that admirably diplomatic letter, so carefully composed by Major Ainlie with the assistance of his friend, Captain St. Maur, could await delivery indefinitely.

It was of this very letter that the young man was thinking while he lay on his heather bed.

"I might chuck that blessed letter into the lake, and make up a story about delivering it," was the first thought that came to him. Then he went on to ask himself if he would not be more likely to enjoy this fine day to the full if he had a consciousness that the letter was sailing away in fragments out to the bosom of the broad Atlantic.

He had clearly no sense of his responsibilities, and so reckless was he that it never occurred to him that Captain St. Maur, to whom he had behaved with such insolence, might take it into his head to

stroll along the road, and find him idling away his time in this fashion. What a triumph it would be for Captain St. Maur were he to detect him in this gross neglect of his duty.

So absorbed was he in neglecting his duty, he was not even aware of the presence of some one on the road who was not Captain St. Maur, but an exceedingly good-looking young woman wearing a well-fitting, tailor-made gown, and a cloth cap to match. But such a traveller certainly passed along within thirty or forty feet of where he was lying, yet without seeing him or knowing that he was there, so perfectly concealed as he was by the thick heather.

The young lady had a companion, however, and the moment that he came abreast of the place where the man had jumped the ditch into the heather of the mountain side, he started. He looked around in a puzzled way for a few moments, allowing the girl to walk on alone. Then he too jumped across the ditch, and making a straight line to where the man was lying, discovered him.

Then there was a scene.

CHAPTER V

THE young man sat up.

"Hallo, old chap, what brings you here?" he cried, as though he had known him all his life, whereas he had never seen him before that moment.

He received no reply. Then, becoming tired of being stared at in this grim and motionless silence, he got upon his feet and said affectionately—

"Good old chap! Good old chap!"

He laid his hand on the good old chap's head, and found that his hair was like silk. He allowed that he had never seen a finer water-spaniel.

But when the dog had responded, up to a certain well-bred point, to his advances, he turned and tore madly across the space to the road after his mistress, who had by this time walked a full hundred yards ahead.

"By George!" exclaimed the man, when his eyes had followed the dog's movements and he

had seen the dog's mistress. "By George! Is this luck or the opposite?"

He stood irresolute for some moments, watching the retreating figure of the girl. Then he muttered, "I'll do it," and, brushing away the bits of heather blossom that adhered to the ribs of his corduroys, he walked quickly back to the road and, striding onward, soon overtook and passed the girl with the dog.

He passed her keeping as far away from her as possible. It seemed that he was now as anxious to discharge his duty as he had previously been to avoid it. For quite a mile he went on at the same pace. But when within half a mile of the house where he was to deliver the letter, he stopped. He had reached a part of the road where it narrowed and became dark, the sunlight being shut out by the abruptness of the mountain slope clad with firs at one side. On the other was the remnant of a wood which straggled down to the salmon river that wound through the valley. At this point he took the letter from his pocket, looking at the address, and then, in a puzzled way, to right and left. A narrow pathway to the river branched off from the main road at this place, and before the girl came up he took a step or two irresolutely down this lane. He got back to the

road, however, just in time to meet her. He looked ostentatiously at the letter which he held, and then, summoning up his courage, he touched his cap respectfully, saying—

"I beg you will pardon me, miss; but I am a stranger in these parts, and I have a letter to deliver. Maybe you would have the kindness to tell me if I am right in taking this turn for Mr. Mahony's place?"

"You would be wrong," she said. "I am Mr. Mahony's daughter, and I am on my way home. If the letter is for my father I might save you the journey on to the house; it is half a mile further on."

"I'm much obliged to you," he said, "but—you'll excuse me, miss, the Major is strict in his orders; he told me to deliver the letter to Mr. Mahony himself, and to bring it back if he wasn't at home."

She smiled.

"You have been a soldier," she said. "Who gave you your orders about the letter?"

"The Major, miss—Major Ainlie."

"Oh!"

The young lady stiffened visibly.

"But it is very good of you to offer to take it for me," he resumed, looking at her

"You had much better carry it yourself," she said, relaxing nothing of her stiffness. "I will show you the way."

"I'm much obliged to you, miss," he said, touching his cap while he stood at "attention," allowing her to pass him. She walked on and he followed, half a dozen paces behind her. The water-spaniel, for some reason of his own, fell behind him.

That was the procession for the next few minutes. The man had the finest opportunity in the world for taking a note of the young woman's figure, and the conclusion that he came to was that he had never seen anything more perfectly graceful in all his life. He had certainly never seen any girl walk so well. He said he was a soldier, and soldiers have many opportunities of watching how women walk in various parts of the world.

His reflections were interrupted by Miss Mahony's sudden turning round. She waited for him to come up to her, and then walked on after speaking. It was plain that her intention was that he should walk beside her, at least so long as she was questioning him.

"What can Major Ainlie have to write to my father about?" she said. "Has he any complaint to make about the place? Is it not just

to his taste? I believe he bought it without seeing it."

"I'm sure he has no complaint to make," the man replied. "I know that he is more than satisfied with the place."

"You say that very confidently," she said quickly. "He only arrived two evenings ago. Does he usually make up his mind so rapidly on important matters?"

"He has had need to sometimes," replied the man. "He has been in some pretty tight places during the war."

"And were you with him?"

The young woman was plainly becoming interested.

"I was in every engagement that he took part in," the man replied.

"Are you going to look after his game on the mountain?" she asked. His corduroys suggested the gamekeeper.

"Yes, miss; I intend to look after the game, but mostly the fishing."

She smiled.

"You are an Englishman?"

"Yes, miss."

"Have you ever been in Ireland before?"

"Never, I'm ashamed to say."

"And you expect to be able to look after the sport in a part of the west where the people are most difficult to manage? Has any one told you that the people in this neighbourhood are most difficult to manage—that they do not consider that Major Ainlie has any rights over the game or the salmon?"

"I never heard a word of that, miss. Is it the case?"

"It is the case, as you will find out presently. You will have your hands full when you set to work with the shooting."

"And who do they say has the rights, miss?"

"My father. You will soon learn something of the Irish way of looking at things—especially things that have to do with sport. They do not believe in the right to sell anything you haven't got, and they say that you haven't got the birds or the fish until you shoot them or catch them."

"And where, then, do Mr. Mahony's rights come in? On this principle he has no more right than any one else to the game."

She laughed.

"They are not quite consistent," she said. "They professed to respect my father's rights, but all the same they poached in every direc-

tion, and we had no money to pay keepers. Major Ainlie is more fortunate in that respect, I hear."

"He's not so particularly well off, after all," said the man quickly, as though he were anxious to relieve Major Ainlie from an unjust charge. "But I'm much obliged to you, Miss Mahony, for giving me these hints. They will be of the greatest service to me."

Again she laughed in the pleasant way that one laughs at the amusing ignorance of a child.

"You will need all the hints you can get, if you hope to have any birds or fish," she said. "I'm afraid that the way my father stood with the people is responsible in a large measure for the difficulties you will find on all sides. I don't suppose that you could understand the relationship that exists between the head of one of the great Irish families and the people about him."

"Oh, yes; I think I can grasp something of it, Miss Mahony, since you have told me—all that you have told me. I know that Major Ainlie was surprised when he saw the mountains and the lake and the river, that Mr. Mahony didn't take some trouble preserving."

"Major Ainlie couldn't have known the condition of our finances," said she.

"But his surprise was that he didn't work the thing so as to make it yield a profit," said the man. "There are tradesmen in London who would be glad to take your grouse by the thousand and your salmon by the ten thousand."

"What! Does Major Ainlie fancy that my father would become a fishmonger all in a moment?" she cried, and there was a flush on her cheeks while she spoke—a flush of indignation.

"But the best people do it nowadays," he said. "I know of at least one Duke who sells his grouse and his pheasants to the shops, and never gives away a single brace."

"That may be; but—oh, I don't suppose that I could make Major Ainlie understand that the head of a great Irish family inherits the pride as well as the mortgages of his ancestors."

She spoke with some heat, but then all at once she froze again. She seemed to feel that she had acted rather too impulsively in beginning—and continuing—to discuss the position of her family with a man who was a total stranger—a man, moreover, who occupied so comparatively humble a place as that of gamekeeper to Major Ainlie. The man had a suspicion of what was in her mind, for when she quickened her pace of walking, he allowed himself to fall gradually behind her, as if

he wished to give her to understand that he knew she had condescended greatly in allowing him to walk by her side and talking to him so freely as she had done.

It was not until she had reached the gate of her father's house that he hurried forward and opened it for her.

She was frigidly polite, inclining her head in recognition of his good manners. But she had scarcely passed through before she turned to him, saying quickly—

"How did you know that this was our house?"

He was slightly confused. A second or two had passed before he said—

"Well, the fact is that—that—miss, oh, yes, I was aware that Mr. Mahony's house was near the sea, and that the gate was off the road. There are not so many houses about here that I should make a mistake."

"Of course there are not," she said. Then she looked in the direction of a tall white-haired gentleman who was reading a newspaper in a chair on the edge of the little lawn. "There is my father," she said. "You can carry out your instructions in regard to the letter in the way Major Ainlie insisted you should."

"Thank you, miss," he said; and taking the

letter from his pocket, he followed her to where the gentleman was sitting.

"Father, this is Major Ainlie's keeper; he has a letter to deliver into your hands," she said.

"Major Ainlie? Who is Major Ainlie? I have not the honour of the acquaintance of any Major Ainlie," said her father, looking severely at the man from head to foot, and making no attempt to take the letter.

The girl seemed somewhat confused; she flushed slightly and appeared annoyed.

"Major Ainlie is the gentleman who lives at the castle now," she said.

"I know of no—no—gentleman who lives at the castle," he said, elevating his chin to the extent of an inch or so.

The man remained at "attention" but did not open his lips. Clearly he was a well-trained fellow, who knew his place in respect of his "betters."

"Did you hear what I said, my good man?" cried Mr. Mahony.

"No, sir," replied the man. "I thought you were speaking to the lady."

"But you have ears, have you not?" said the other in a tone of irritation.

"Yes, sir," replied the man with soldier-like

precision, as though he were answering an ordinary question.

"Then use them when I tell you that I have not, nor do I desire to have any knowledge of any Major—what did you say the name was, Kathleen?"

"Major Ainlie, father. But the man brings a letter—it may contain something——"

"It cannot possibly contain anything of the remotest interest to me," said Mr. Mahony. "Take the letter and read it if you are so minded. The fellow will become a statue if he stands this way much longer."

He turned his back upon the man and resumed his reading of the newspaper. The girl took the letter, and flushed again, with a frown. It was plain that she was a little ashamed of the gross impoliteness of her father.

"Did Major Ainlie say that you were to wait for a reply?" she inquired.

"He said that there might be a reply, miss," said the man.

She opened the letter and read it. Then she bent over her father's shoulder and whispered something. He threw down his paper petulantly, saying—

"Nonsense, Kathleen! I tell you as I told you long ago, I wish to have nothing to do with the

fellow. A good letter? Oh, all men of that stamp write good letters. Any one can write a good letter. The greater the cad the more plausibly he writes. Give me the thing."

He adjusted his pince-nez, and taking the letter in one finger and thumb, he glanced through it.

"Does the man think that I am to be taken in by such a thing as this?" he cried. "Does he fancy that he will get over me by his crawling—*crawling*, I say? Does he hope to impose on me by his sham humility? I would think far better of him if he were to write a good manly, straightforward letter, telling me what I know he feels—that he has kicked me out of my home, but that he has no chance of being received by decent people here unless I help him. But I'll see him hanged before I put out a finger to help him. Shall I write and tell him so? Yes, get me a pen and ink. I'll show him that I see through his paltry——"

"You shall do nothing of the sort," said the girl in a low voice when her father jumped up on his feet. "I would be ashamed if such a letter were to come from this house."

"Don't dictate to me, Kathleen," he said. "Here, put this letter into its envelope and return it to the man to give it to his master—that will be his answer."

The girl—her face was now beautifully roseate—made an indignant gesture. Then she turned to the keeper, saying—

"You were mistaken. Major Ainlie's letter does not require any answer. You will have the goodness to say that you delivered it, and that Mr. Mahony read it, and will make a note of its contents."

She had seen that non-compromising phrase on the blue foolscap which her father had received more than once from the secretary of the Insurance Company who held the mortgage of the castle, in reply to his application for more time. She thought that it was a very convenient phrase.

"Thank you, miss," said the man, touching his cap. "Good morning to you, miss. Good morning, sir."

"Tell your master that he may——" began Mr. Mahony; but he was too late. The man had wheeled, and was marching to the gate before he had got his next word out, and somehow his turning his back upon Mr. Mahony when he began to speak had the semblance of paying him back in his own coin. It was eminently disrespectful. It made Mr. Mahony very angry.

"You see that," he cried to his daughter. "Like master, like man! The fellow is grossly disrespectful."

"No; he has some self-respect," said the girl, walking to the house.

Her father watched her without a word; he did not even swear until she had disappeared. He knew his daughter pretty well, and he was not without his experience of arguing with her. The result was always the same: without getting at all beated she invariably made him feel that he was in the wrong. Even now he was aware of a disagreeable impression in regard to his own conduct in the presence of that good-looking and well-set-up keeper whom Major Ainlie had employed for the delivery of his letter. Perhaps he had been carried too far by his own bitter feelings. He had been undignified. The keeper would certainly be entitled to report to his master that he, Mr. Mahony, was a petulant, peppery old man, ready to take offence where no offence was intended; and his master would say—

"Then he may go to the deuce for all I care. I'm jolly well rid of him, and I'm jolly well pleased that there's now no need for me to be polite to the old curmudgeon!"

But because Mr. Mahony chanced to have such a thought, any one who might have fancied that he would admit so much even to his daughter, would have made a very great mistake. No matter how much he might feel himself to be in the wrong, he

would never admit that he had deviated in the smallest degree from the path of rectitude.

For the remainder of the morning he gave himself a very bad time, imagining what that Englishman who had bought him out would say when his keeper had made the report of the result of his delivery of the letter. And as for the young keeper himself, he felt sure that he would be insolent enough to ridicule him, Mr. Mahony, in the presence of the other members of the staff of the wealthy Englishman. The act of the keeper in turning his back and marching off the moment he, Mr. Mahony, had begun to speak, showed of what he was capable; and the old gentleman heard in fancy the guffaws of the other people on the estate while the young man gave an exaggerated imitation of his petulance on receiving that courteous letter from the man who had bought him out. Yes, it is to be feared that Mr. Mahony passed a thoroughly disagreeable morning, in spite of the exceptionally fine weather, and the romantic scenery in the heart of which his home was situated.

As for his daughter, when she entered the house she felt ready to cry from the sense of humiliation of which she was conscious. She had wondered what this Major Ainlie, who had taken possession of their castle, would be like. She hated him in

advance, as thoroughly as a woman can hate a man whom she has never seen; and she hoped with all her heart that he would be all that she imagined he must be—a complete bounder, the purse-proud son of one of those dreadful manufacturing people whom she had heard of as living in the Midlands of England. To be sure he had been in the army and had won distinction for himself both in the Sudan and South Africa; but these facts did not make it impossible that he should be a very common man. A large number of very common men had gone out to South Africa with some of the irregular corps and had distinguished themselves. She hoped that if she were to meet him she would find him to be such a man as fully justified the dislike she felt for him.

She felt that she did well to be angry with this Major Ainlie. How could any Irish girl with any self-respect fail to be angry with the man who had turned her and her father out of the home which their family had occupied for hundreds of years? How could she avoid feeling bitterly against him when she thought of his using the room which her dear mother had made her boudoir—the room in which Kathleen Mahony herself had spent so many happy days when she was a child and had stood by a book at her mother's knee to learn her

letters—as a smoking-room? To be sure she had no knowledge of his intention to make this transformation; but she had a quick imagination, and her instinctive dislike to the man induced her to fancy the worst she could of him in order that she might dislike him the more.

But Kathleen's imagination did not carry her quite so far as her father's prejudices had carried him. She might detest him for coming to live in the home which had been her father's fathers', back to the days of Ireland's glories, but she felt that it would be unjust to him to suggest, as her father had done, that Major Ainlie had a disrespectful gamekeeper. She had an impression that the keeper was an exceedingly well-mannered man, and, moreover, an extremely good-looking fellow. He too had been a soldier, and her Irish heart went out to every fighting man. She blamed her father for his failure to recognize the virtues of the keeper in the blindness of his prejudices against his master; and she blamed him also for allowing his ill-feeling to pervert his judgment in respect of the letter which the man had delivered. No sensible person could say that the letter was written in bad taste. On the contrary, she considered it to be a graceful and courteous production, showing such an excellent

feeling and such an offer of friendliness that Kathleen felt momentarily annoyed at being deprived of her most cherished illusion—of the prejudice which she had so earnestly cultivated against the writer.

After dwelling for some time upon the whole matter, a thought suddenly struck her. Like every other girl worth talking about, she had her impulses and acted in accordance with their promptings ; she did so now. She snatched up a sheet of notepaper which was lying in the open blotter on the table in her room and wrote a few lines upon it, putting it into an envelope which she addressed to the Gamekeeper, Rathdearg Castle.

CHAPTER VI

IT seemed as if Major Ainlie had received a very full and faithful account of the scene that had taken place just outside the picturesquely situated abode of Mr. Mahony, when the letter, which had been so carefully composed, had been referred to in rather uncomplimentary tones by the recipient, for Ainlie was able to relate in detail to his friend St. Maur, all that had happened upon this occasion.

"My aunt!" said St. Maur. "The old boy must be a barbarian. Hang me, if that letter wouldn't be enough to conciliate a double Dutchman! What the mischief did he find to object to in it?"

"Oh, what Maguire said about him was the gospel truth," said Ainlie. "He is a finely matured and well-crusted specimen of the descendant of the kings of Ireland, looking on the Saxons as deadly enemies with whom no truce is possible."

"His prejudices against the race didn't prevent him from pocketing the Saxon gold when he needed

it," replied St. Maur. "These proud Johnnies pocket their pride jolly quick when it's a question of pocketing the Saxon gold as well. Where has the man been living all these years that he has been spending his money and hoarding up his prejudices?"

"Poor old chap! We mustn't be too hard on him," said Ainlie. "You must remember that his family pride is all that he has remaining to him in the world."

"Wasn't there some talk about his having a daughter?" remarked St. Maur. "Yes; I'm nearly sure that I heard some one mention a daughter or something of that sort."

"Poor girl! She must have rather a trying time with such a parent," said Ainlie. "She has her pride too."

"She has reason to be proud of her father, hasn't she?" said St. Maur. "Well, now you'll be able to spare a moment to the salmon, I hope. 'The poor craythurs is worn to skin and bone wid the waitin' for some 'un to throw thim a fly,' Patsy O'Leary told me in confidence an hour ago. Patsy is on the friendliest terms with the salmon. He calls them by their names to come and be hooked."

"Maguire has been invaluable," said Ainlie. "Without his help where should we be to-day?

What fools we should look making the attempt to get servants and gillies in this neighbourhood."

"He is a treasure," acquiesced St. Maur. "He told me the principle he had adopted in order to get the very best men for your mountain and your river. He selected the very best poachers, and the thing was done."

"I'm told that such a scheme works very well in these parts," said Ainlie. "At any rate, by adopting it we reduce the ranks of the poachers by six adepts, and that's a good thing by itself."

"I had a long talk with Patsy," resumed St. Maur. "He had, of course, heard about the deputation that waited upon you to give you a hearty welcome, and he says that all the people are delighted at the way it turned out. They all hate Sullivan, and for the best of reasons—namely because they all owe him money. You have leapt into popularity in a day."

"Yes, because I relieve them of the obligation to pay Sullivan. I know that sort of popularity."

"I really wouldn't go so far as to say that it was wholly on this account that the people are on your side. The truth is, I believe, that they are anxious for peace and quiet, and they have found that the best way to bring about both is to have among them a man who has money to spend,

and is not afraid to thrash a scoundrel. You'll have no more trouble while you remain here. The constabulary officer says so much, and there's no better judge of the people and their feelings."

"I hope he is right. Anyhow, we shall have a look at a mile or two of the river after lunch, and begin operations in the morning. We'll take Patsy with us as an adviser."

"Good. I'm glad that our coming here is not going to be the fiasco I feared last night it might be."

"I'm greatly obliged for your good wishes, old chap."

They were just at the point of setting out for the river after they had had lunch, when a small boy of the "gossoon" order put in an appearance on the drive. He carried a letter which he had wrapped in a piece of newspaper to protect it from the many vicissitudes of transit.

"Who are you, and what are you carrying?" inquired Ainlie, when the boy pulled at his forelock with considerable vigour.

"Sure, an' 'tis a letther that the young lady give to me to carry to himself," replied the boy. "But 'tis misself that can't find him nowhere at all."

"And who is himself?" said Ainlie.

"Maybe yer hon'r can put me on the way of findin' himself," said the boy.

He handed him a letter addressed—

"To the Gamekeeper at Rathdearg Castle."

Major Ainlie turned the envelope over, and looked at the address with a puzzled expression.

"Who gave you this to deliver, my good lad?" he asked the boy.

The boy looked pained as well as surprised.

"Why, yer hon'r, who but herself would be afther givin' it to me?" he said.

"Oh, of course—herself? Why didn't you say so before?" said Major Ainlie.

"Yer hon'r never axed me," the boy replied.

"I don't believe I did," said Ainlie. "Well, here's something for your trouble."

He took a shilling out of his pocket and offered it to the boy, who, however, only acknowledged its proximity by a pull at his forelock.

"Sure I did it for herself, not for a bit o' money, sir," he said, and Major Ainlie, unaccustomed as he was to such a phenomenon as a peasant boy's refusing an offer of money, found himself actually blushing before the boy.

"Right you are, my boy," he said. "I forgot for the moment that you were doing it for—for—herself."

"She told me I was to give it to the keeper who called at the house an hour or two ago; and you're not him, sir," said the boy with some diffidence.

"Trust to me that the man who called at the house will read it—I promise you that," said Major Ainlie.

"'Tis enough for me that that is, so it is," said the boy. His anxiety clearly relieved, he was off like a hare down the drive.

"That's an Irish gentleman," said St. Maur. "There's no gentleman like an Irish peasant boy that hasn't been corrupted by tourists. But what on earth——" He glanced in the direction of the letter.

"That's just what I have been asking myself. 'What on earth——' Well, I suppose I may as well open it at once. You are in the secret up to the hilt, and you may as well be kept abreast of all that happens."

He tore off the cover, and St. Maur sauntered on—

"Miss Mahony wishes to apologize to the gamekeeper who carried the letter from the castle, for the discourtesy with which he was received in the discharge of his duty. She hopes that the gamekeeper, who showed himself to be respectful and

good-tempered, will understand that Mr. Mahony was taken greatly by surprise in receiving a letter from Major Ainlie, and spoke impulsively. Since then he has acknowledged that he made a mistake.

"Miss Mahony is sure that the gamekeeper will make some allowance for the abruptness of an old man who has many troubles."

This was the letter which Ainlie read, walking very slowly after his friend.

"She is a jewel of a girl," he whispered. "A very jewel of a girl—a pearl of girlhood—a diamond of womanhood!"

He spoke under the influence of a power that made him express himself poetically for the first time in his life.

He put the letter into the pocket of his jacket, and when he caught up on St. Maur he simply said—

"The letter was from——"

"Herself—the gossoon said so; and there's only one 'herself' in these parts," cried St. Maur.

"I agree with you. Well, she writes to the keeper who took my letter to her father this morning apologizing for her father's brusqueness, and assuring the keeper that in her opinion he, the keeper, conducted himself quite respectfully. Now,

I wonder whether we shall meet Patsy at the village or at the river ? "

" He is sure to be waiting for us at the river. I know the short cut to the rapids," said St. Maur.

" The short cut ? Well, I suppose it will not take us very much longer to go by the short cut than if we took the roundabout track."

" I don't as a rule favour short cuts through a strange country—I never have time enough for them ; but I worked this one out on an Ordnance map," said St. Maur.

They took their short cut, and, in spite of the many obstructions which it offered to unwary travellers, in the form of boggy places and gaping ditches, and awkward hedges to surmount, they eventually came upon the salmon river where it widened out over the shallows, brawling along between the high shady banks and the big smooth boulders of the river bed—an ideal place for fish.

" Cæsar Augustus ! " cried St. Maur when he had gazed down upon the myriad swirls and ripples that twinkled into the distance. " What would our feelings be if we had been born to this, and lived with it for fifty or sixty years, and were then told to clear off it ? "

" That's the way to put it," said Ainlie ; " and the conclusion you come to is that there never

lived a better-tempered man than Mr. Mahony in Ireland—the island of good-tempered people."

And then Patsy O'Leary strolled up and, prostrating himself on the edge of the bank, bade the Major and his friend do the same, promising them the sight of a leaping salmon within the next five minutes. They did so, and they saw not one salmon, but four, and all three-pound fish. Another five minutes and a magnificent ten-pounder flung himself over an obstructing boulder and came with a delicious flop into the deep black pool on the other side. The place was a salmon-fisher's paradise.

"Why on earth did we waste all the morning?" cried St. Maur when he got up on his feet once more. "If we had only come down here with the rods we might now be carrying that noble boy up to the castle."

"If we had done all that we should not now be looking forward to grabbing him to-morrow," said Ainlie.

"Anyhow, he has a father and a mother and sisters and brothers," put in Patsy. "Faith, 'tis me is well acquainted with me gintleman in the wather below. He threw a friendly wink just now before making his lep, as much as to say, 'Is it yourself that's back again, Patsy?' Och, he knows me well enough by this time."

"You have done a bit of fishing here in your time, I'll swear," said Ainlie.

"A bit o' fishin'—is it fishin' yer hon'r's talkin' about?" cried Patsy, the guardian of the waters. "Well, ye see, sir, of late years Mr. Mahony had so many thrubbles he couldn't but leave the river to take care of itself. So parsavin' how it was, I thought it a sin and a shame that the poor craythurs should be left pinin' away for the want of some one to catch them. I'm tellin' ye, gintlemen, my heart went out for thim poor fish; for 'tis a cruel sinsitive craythur that the salmon is; 'tis mesself that has seen one o' them that was landed in a hurry, without makin' anything of a fight for it, blush as pink as any young lady when we looked at it—all through shame at bein' took by surprise and givin' us no sport."

"And had you the heart to put that pretty thing into a kettle?" asked St. Maur.

"No, sir; what we did was to throw it back into the river to give it another chance of retrievin' its character."

"And you never saw it again?"

"Oh, didn't we just! I'm tellin' ye the truth, gintlemen, when I say that the very next week we hooked a fish that we thought we never would get landed. Never was there such a bit of play seen

as that darlin' thing put in. For two mortal hours it kept us goin'; twiced 'twas me was head under in the deepest pool, and I could ha' put out my fist and grabbed the tail o' the craythur that was swimming about beside of me. But I wasn't goin' to be so low as to take advantage of it like that. Well, gintlemen, to make a long story short, the fish dhragged us across the wather, back'ards and for'ards, three times before we conthrived to get it on the bank, and by the powers, if it wasn't the selfsame salmon that we had resthored to the wather. That tells ye what Irish fish is, gintlemen."

"It does, indeed," said Ainlie. "By the way, you said that the fish blushed, did you not?"

"An' 'twas the thruth I towld ye, sir," said Patsy.

"Oh, I don't doubt it for a moment," said Major Ainlie. "Yes, it was the fish that blushed."

Patsy laughed in appreciation of the delicate suggestion made by his master.

"And who was it that used to fish here besides yourself?" asked St. Maur.

"The owld man was a first-rate hand at the reel until his thrubbles came, God help him," replied the man. "But 'twas Master Desmond and Miss Kathleen that did the most of the lawful

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fishin' here of late—ay, an' the Captain," he added in a different tone.

"The Captain? Who is the Captain?" asked Ainlie.

"Captain Kenney, sir," replied Patsy. "He's the—the—gintleman"—the word came from him reluctantly—"that lives in Creagh House."

"I saw it yesterday—just outside the village," said St. Maur. "And who is this—this—gentleman?"

"There's a story about him bein' in the Milishy some place and some time, but nobody knows the truth of the story—there's people that says bad even of the Milishy," replied Patsy. "He keeps a horse or two and goes in for thrainin' in a fashion. He tuk a great fancy for Master Desmond, worse luck! If it hadn't been for that, Master Desmond might be here to-day. You see, sir, there's not over much o' the quality to be found in these parts, and such as there is they live pretty wide apart; so that people in the same station is apt to get more familiar with each other than they would in Dublin. But thim that says that Miss Kathleen looked on him with any favour whatever is liars. Why, don't I know that at the last she gave up fishin' here by reason of his botherin' of her? But everybody sees that the Captain is fairly crazy

after herself. The worst of it is that Mr. Mahony owes him a bit o' money, that the Captain says Mr. Desmond had off him, and so he can't be sent off with a flea in his ear."

"By George!" exclaimed St. Maur when, strolling along the banks, they came to a point where the river made a sudden turn and then slipped between a long arcade of trees on both sides, whose branches clasped hands over the stream. "By George, what a picture!"

They walked on for three or four miles under the personal conductorship of Patsy, whose memory (or imagination) was fully equal to what he conceived to be the demands put upon it. He told story after story of the salmon and the fishers; and all were quaint and amusing, and occasionally had the merit of being incredible as well. Not another word, however, did he breathe regarding the Mahonys or their friends, false or true, although at least one of his listeners would have been glad to hear anything that he had to tell—or even invent—respecting the family, especially one member of it.

While they were drinking tea together the same evening, St. Maur congratulated his friend upon having acquired so desirable a property. If he had got only that splendid nine miles of salmon river, it would still be the most desirable property in the

British Islands, St. Maur affirmed, and Ainlee agreed with him.

"What a pity it is that we can't be friends," he added enigmatically.

"What the mischief do you mean—can't be friends?" cried St. Maur. "What, man, if I wished to cut myself adrift from so undesirable an acquaintance, do you fancy that I would do it at this moment—having just returned from that walk by the river? Why, I would bury the hatchet in the presence of my greatest enemy if he offered me a month on such a river. Oh, you are mistaken. We can quite easily be friends."

Ainlie smiled grimly.

"I can't forget what you said when we got beside the river. You said just what came into my mind at that very moment. 'How should you like to be turned out of such a fishing as that?' That is what I have been feeling all the afternoon."

"Well, you have had the question answered. Don't you know exactly how old man Mahony feels? If you don't, he must express himself very badly. Anyway, I wouldn't bother myself about him. If he doesn't choose to allow you to make friends, that's his look out. The friendship and the fishing go together, I'm pleased to think."

"I don't bother myself about *him*."

"Oh, as for—for—herself—well, you may bother yourself as much as you please, but I'll take jolly good care that you don't bother me. Hang it all, Harry, old chap, take a reasonable Romeo and Juliet view of the affair. Don't the squabbles between two great families usually end in the young couples falling in love, and if they don't live happy——"

"Romeo and Juliet isn't what might be called a notable instance of a happy ending. Never mind. I'll wait for the situation to develop."

"And, meantime, don't worry. You'll be all right when you get among the fish, take my word for it."

Captain St. Maur proved a sound prophet. The next day the two men were up early, and found the faithful Patsy waiting for them with the second in command, and a lunch-basket that was no toy affair. The river was in even better condition than it had seemed to them before, the day being of a type that St. Maur called the true Connemara grey, with the promise of rain. It was only befitting that Major Ainlie should land the first fish—a lively four-pounder; and his luck continued without a break till lunch time, when he had three fish to his credit, making an aggregate of

fifteen pounds. St. Maur had then a look in, and succeeded, after half an hour's play, in bringing within reach of the gaff a noble fish of eleven pounds.

It is obvious that with such a day's sport there was no room for any uncongenial reflections regarding the unfriendliness of the late owner of the fishing. Not a word did St. Maur hear of this gentleman or his daughter, and he began to feel that his friend was on his way to become companionable once more.

The next day they had a shoot over the mountain, and found it on the whole much better than they had been led to expect it would be. The moor had undoubtedly been given over to poachers for the previous fortnight; the birds were wild and wary in turn; but, in spite of all, the four guns—Maguire and the Constabulary officer were also on the scene—accounted for thirty brace of grouse and a dozen hares.

St. Maur and Maguire went to a trout stream the day following the shoot; but Ainlie was compelled to remain at the castle in order to get through some business relating to his English property that could be put off no longer.

Late in the afternoon he left his writing-room, and shortly afterwards there appeared on the drive,

going from the castle, the same well-set-up, corduroyed young gamekeeper who had carried the letter to Mr. Mahony. He was plainly at a loose end this afternoon, having no such important duty to discharge. He lounged along aimlessly, swinging his ash plant, and, possibly because he was only acquainted with the one road, he walked in the direction of the lough.

He passed the entrance gate to Mr. Mahony's house, and continued his stroll on the little track to the lough itself. But then it seemed as if a spirit of exploration had taken possession of him, for, instead of keeping to the track that led along the summit of the cliffs, he turned off at an angle where the ground sloped downward into the hollow of a narrow glen about a mile long—a romantic place of huge rocks overgrown with lichen, and with mighty tufted ferns springing from every hollow. A tiny stream wound its silver thread among the mossed stones in the bed, only twinkling now and again as it emerged from the overhanging low crags.

Before he had gone more than half a mile through this place of lovely loneliness he had come to the conclusion that he had never before alighted upon a spot that was so typical of the Ireland of his imagination. It was a true Irish glen, such as in-

spired the fancy of the fairies dancing by moonlight —the "little people," as the inhabitants called them—of the "leprechaun" and the "white lady." He seated himself in a hollow between two rocks and listened to the evening song of the blackbirds, while he watched the dart of the snipe that were making a meal in the marshy bed of the rivulet.

Suddenly one of the birds fled athwart his resting-place with its cry of alarm—its trivial cackle that tells of an enemy at hand. The next moment he became aware of voices among the crags at one side. The speakers were hidden by the straggling growth of a bramble, but he could hear every word that was spoken by at least one of the persons.

"I tell you that you are a coward, and I am not afraid of you. You think that because I am alone in this place I am at your mercy. You make a mistake. Allow me to pass."

In a second he was on his feet. He knew that voice. It was the voice of Kathleen Mahony.

CHAPTER VII

HE was on his feet, awaiting whatever might follow the girl's indignant speech. What followed was a man's laugh, provoking by reason of the air of triumph there was in it.

"Oh, yes; you are on your high horse just now, my beauty, but I see you so seldom now that I mean to make the most of my luck," came a man's voice following the laugh. Then, in another tone, it went on—

"Look here, Kathleen, don't you think that you are a bit of a fool to treat me like this? Don't you know that I worship the very ground you tread on? Ay, and can you deny that you gave me encouragement last year?"

"I do deny it, Captain Kenney," she cried. "I knew that my brother owed you money and that my father owed you money, and for their sakes I treated you civilly, in spite of your insult to me when you thought that I was in your power."

"You know well enough that you encouraged me, you little trickster," said the man. "Maybe

I was over rash in the way I talked to you that day when we were stranded on the island. But that's an old story now. And wasn't I meek and humble enough to please a princess afterwards ? "

" Yes, when Desmond was at home. You knew that if I had told him how you had spoken to me, he would have laid his dog-whip across your shoulders."

" Would he ? Don't you believe it. He knew that I could have put him in gaol at any moment," said the man. " Come now, my lovely wild cat, sheath your claws, or I'll find a way of making you. Kathleen, you know that I'm honourable now. You know that I'm willing to marry you to-morrow if you'll have me, and by the Lord Harry, you shall have me ! "

" Let me go—let me go—I loathe you—let me go, I say ! "

" Not till I have had my kiss. I'll not let you go—I know girls of your stamp : they only respect the man that shows himself their master. Come now—curse you for a wild cat ! But I'll have my kiss, or I'll break your neck for it."

The girl cried out, and in a second the young man in corduroy had struck down the bramble with his ash stick and had leapt over the intervening stones. He saw that the man, holding both the girl's wrists,

had forced her to her knees before him. She was struggling and gasping while he thrust his face down to hers, only to meet the crown of the knitted cap that she was wearing. His lips did not even get so close to her as to touch her cap, for before he had heard the sound of his coming, the other had crashed down upon him. He had caught the man by the throat and sent him reeling into the brambles. The force of the impact made an alcove in the hedge—a deep niche where Captain Kenney stood like a statue. He soon lost the statue-like quality of immobility, however. He made a rush at his assailant, but stopped short when the young man in corduroy shortened the ash stick that he held, in a business-like way. Captain Kenney thought it prudent to halt a yard or two away from him.

"What the devil do you mean, you blackguard?" he yelled, shaking his fist as close to the other as he thought it prudent to come.

"I hope, Miss Mahony, that I did not frighten you," said the other, touching his cap as respectfully as ever.

"Frighten me?" she gave a laugh and looked at her wrists; they were red. "Oh, no; I can assure you that it was not you who frightened me. You came here at the right moment."

She had not yet become collected. She pressed her left hand to her side. Her breath came in gasps.

"You insolent scoundrel—this lady is Miss Mahony—my friend—tell the infernal English servant that I say the truth, Kathleen," cried Captain Kenney.

"Pray calm yourself, Miss Mahony," said the keeper, ignoring the speaker. "There is no danger now—there never was any danger. I will walk with you to your home, if you will honour me by your permission."

"I have to thank you very much," said she after a brief pause. "I will be glad to have you with me."

"Hold!" cried Captain Kenney, carrying out to the letter the part of stage villain upon whom he had founded his character. "Hold! How dare you, sir, a common servant, insult me as well as assault me? I do not demean myself by treating you as I would a gentleman and my equal—if you were, I would send you headlong down there, sir—down among those rocks, you rascal."

"A good place for snipe, I reckon, miss," said the keeper, nodding in the direction of the little stream.

Miss Mahony had sufficiently recovered from her recent excitement to be able to laugh.

"Your professional instinct seems to be above all other considerations with you," she said. "There are snipe by the dozen in the glen. I am quite ready now."

She had spoken too confidently. She had not taken more than half a dozen steps before she staggered; but he was on the look out for this, and his arm was about her in a second—only for a second, however; then she laid her hand upon his sleeve.

"I must have put my foot upon a loose stone," she said with a little laugh. She stood supporting herself a minute.

"How dare you lay your dirty hand upon a lady?" shouted Captain Kenney. "By heaven, I will make this the dearest half-hour of your life. Come, Kathleen, I will be your escort."

She never as much as glanced at him. She kept her hand upon the arm of her rescuer.

"Thank you; I am quite ready this time," she said.

"Go very slowly, those loose stones are very treacherous," said he.

"By my soul, girl, I'll inform your father of this," cried Kenney. "He will have a word to say to your behaviour, or I'm greatly mistaken. A keeper —a common corduroy keeper! And as for you, you

rascal, I'll take good care that your master hoofs you out of his employment before the week is out."

He strode away, shaking his fist, first at the girl, then at her companion.

They watched him without a word until he had disappeared.

The man in corduroy laughed; but when the girl removed her hand from his arm, he became extremely solicitous for her welfare. He asked her if she really thought herself strong enough to walk without assistance—had she not better lean on him. She assured him that she was now quite strong; and she proved it by walking boldly on for a considerable way. At first he kept by her side, but then he dropped respectfully behind her. There was no need for him to do so except on the ground of good manners—the good manners of a servant walking with a lady.

But before she had gone in this way further than a score of yards, she stopped, and there was some trace of irritation in her voice when she said—

"Do you walk behind me so as to be in a better position to catch me should I fall?"

He put his finger to his cap.

"I will walk where you please, Miss Mahony," he said.

"It stands to reason, doesn't it, that after what

has happened,—you were not so reserved in regard to Captain Kenney a few minutes ago."

"What! Don't you think that I treated him with extraordinary deference—considering?" he asked. "He called me a scoundrel—a blackguard—names that no man ever called me before, and yet I let him walk away."

"Why did you do that? I have been wondering why you did that," she cried. "Of course, my quarrel with him was nothing to you—but still——"

"Nothing to me—you think that it was nothing to me that that fellow had laid his foul hands on you?"

"Oh!"

He had spoken so vehemently that she was plainly startled. That was why she flushed a little. They walked on for about a dozen steps, and again she stopped abruptly, saying—

"Why did you not knock him down the glen when he called you those names—you could easily have done it, you know?"

"Good Lord!" he cried. "Did you wish me to punish him? And all the time I was holding myself back because I thought you meant me to do so—I thought that you so quickly accepted my escort in order to draw me away, so that I should not—but it is not too late yet——"

He took a few quick steps forward.

"Stop, please," she cried. "You read what was in my mind exactly, and you were very clever to do it. I was afraid that you might get into trouble."

"What, did you fancy that he would give me any trouble? "

"Not in that way. But you might have struck him so hard that—that——"

"That the romantic features of the glen might be increased by the walking of the ghost of one Captain Kenney through it ? "

"What you thought was this : 'Even if I should only break the man's head, Miss Mahony's name will be brought into the story of how it happened.' Is not that so ? "

"That is just what I thought, though how on earth you came to find out——"

"Did not you find out what was in my mind ? Do you consider yourself so much cleverer than I am ? I have heard that keepers in some big places in England have a pretty fair conceit of themselves."

"So they have. I hope you do not consider that I forgot myself, Miss Mahony ? "

"But that is just what I do think. You did forget yourself—you forgot yourself altogether,

and remembered only me. I thank you. If you were an Irishman you could not have shown more promptness and tact."

"That is the highest compliment I ever had paid to me. And now, Miss Mahony, don't you think that we would do well to consider the incident closed, as they say in diplomacy?"

"As they say in diplomacy? That is rather an odd way for you to put it."

"I was once on duty at Government House in Natal, and I suppose I caught some of the phrases that were flying about."

"Oh! You seem to have had a considerable amount of experience—varied too, Mr. . . . By the way, I have not yet had a chance of hearing your name."

He laughed.

"What is your name?" she inquired.

"Henry—my name is Henry," he replied quite glibly; but he made a little pause after she had spoken. "I have not had 'Mr.' put before it for ten years," he added; and he spoke the truth.

"I will not be the one to begin it, Henry," she said, and he felt a delicious tingling all over his body as she pronounced his name. It was too dusky in the glen to allow of her seeing the effect that her voice had upon his face.

"Thank you," he said. "Just now you said 'Mr.' I am glad that you did not know my name then. By the way, I meant to say that it was not necessary for you to write me that letter, although you may be sure that I appreciated your kindness in writing it."

"How could I allow you to go away with a worse impression of us than we deserved?" she said.

"What would it matter what a keeper thought?" said he.

"Let me tell you that, whatever it may be in England, in Ireland we treat our gamekeepers and huntsmen as sportsmen," she said warmly. "You see, we hold that if a man is a real sportsman, he can be nothing finer. I have an idea that it is only cooks in England who are treated in this spirit."

"I never kept company with a cook," said he; "but I have heard them complaining in the servants' hall about the want of appreciation of their employers. One of them gave a month's notice because a jelly that she made came untouched from the table."

She laughed.

"You are an Englishman; you treat everything that one says so seriously," she cried. "Of course, I never suggested that—that——"

"Was your letter not meant seriously?" he asked quickly.

"It was. Indeed I was very sorry that——"

"Please do not hurt me by suggesting that I did not understand what was in Mr. Mahony's mind. It was a bit snobbish for Major Ainlie to write as he did to Mr. Mahony."

"You and Major Ainlie seem to be on very friendly terms. You knew what was in his letter?"

He nodded.

"And you thought it snobbish? I cannot agree with you. I think it showed good feeling and an honest attempt to make amends for—for——"

"For what, Miss Mahony?"

"For being wealthy, when we were so poverty-stricken. Is he a good sort? I somehow fancy that he must be a good sort, though, as I told you when I saw you before, I was as greatly prejudiced against him as my father is." Then she hastily pulled herself up; she seemed to remember with great suddenness that she was only talking to a keeper. "I beg your pardon for asking you so absurd a question. I had no right to ask you for your private opinion of your employer. At any rate, you are spared the need for a reply. Here we are at home—safe, thanks to——"

"To luck, Miss Mahony."

They had emerged from the glen and were now within a step or two of the gate. "If you are convinced that Major Ainlie is a good sort, would you be persuaded to return to the river some day with your rod? I heard Patsy tell the Major casually that you were the most faithful of the salmon fishers."

"That is quite another matter," she said stiffly. It was the dusk of the twilight, but still he thought he could perceive a certain brightness in her eyes that was at variance with the cold tone in which she spoke. "Did Major Ainlie instruct you to invite me? Did he not show that he felt insulted by the way his graceful letter was received?"

"He felt no more insulted than I did, Miss Mahony—perhaps a little sore, but that was all. He gave me to understand that even if your father refused it would make him—the Major, I mean—feel less of an aggressor if you were to return to your old place on the river."

"I have no desire to become acquainted with Major Ainlie," said she coldly.

"Shall I tell him that you said so, Miss Mahony?"

"Of course not; you could not put the matter in the way I mean. All that I mean is that—that as my father takes up so strong a position against Major Ainlie——"

"But Major Ainlie has no notion of forcing his company upon you."

"Your tone suggests that he is no more anxious to make my acquaintance than I am to make his."

"I did not mean all that, Miss Mahony. What I meant to hint was that he is so ready to get on a friendly footing with Mr. Mahony that I have his orders to attend you should you ever take up your old place on the river. I happen to know that he feels very—very uncomfortable on account of the way Mr. Mahony's back is set up. I don't think he quite deserves such treatment."

"It seems to me that you might be Major Ainlie's secretary rather than his gamekeeper. Talk of the intimate terms on which an Irish landlord stands in regard to his keepers—why, it is nothing to the friendliness that there seems to be between Major Ainlie and yourself."

"You see, I have known him from the time he was a boy. In fact, we were boys together. It is not going too far to say that I know his intimate thoughts."

"And you really think that he would feel less —less—uncomfortable—that was the word you used —if I were to have a day's fishing on the river?"

"I can swear to it, Miss Mahony. It would

be the greatest act of charity you ever did in your life."

She made no reply to him. Through the silence of the dusk the sound of the breaking of the long rollers from the Atlantic came to their ears. Suddenly she put out her hand to him, saying—

"Good evening. My father will be wondering what has become of me."

He did not follow her example in regard to his hand. He looked at her hand and then at his own.

"Is it usual for ladies in Ireland to shake hands with gamekeepers?" he asked.

"I have known of its being done," she said. "You must remember that I have never said a word of gratitude to you for having saved me from that horrid man."

"I knew that you would not hurt me by doing anything of the sort," said he. "If you were thinking of that when you offered me your hand, I am glad that you took it back."

"I think, Henry, I have seen enough of you to know that you are not the sort of man to look for gratitude—at least an expression of gratitude. Only—I should like to shake hands with you."

He took off his cap and his hand met hers. He bowed his head over it.

"Good evening, Miss Mahony," he said.

"Good-bye," she said.

"Oh, I hope not 'good-bye,'" he cried. "Surely we shall meet again?"

There was another silence before she said—

"I hope not."

Then, before he had recovered from his surprise, she had hurried through the gates and was half-way up the little drive.

He went slowly away.

But before he had gone more than a hundred yards he heard the sound of pattering feet on the road behind him. A voice went through the air calling softly.

"Henry."

He stopped, and in a moment she was by his side, breathing quickly from the exertion of her run.

"Miss Mahony! What has happened? The fellow is not there?" he cried.

"Tell me this?" she gasped. "Would it gratify you if I were to take a day on the river with a rod?"

"Can you ask, Miss Mahony? I swear to you that nothing that any one could do would give me the same pleasure."

"Then I will come some day."

"What day?"

"Some day when none of the Castle party will be there."

"I can tell you the day when there will be no chance of becoming acquainted with any of them. To-day is Friday. Next Tuesday and Wednesday will be off days, so far as the river is concerned. I shall have a gaff and landing-net. Of course you know the Falls pool?"

"I should think I do know it! I shall be there on Wednesday at ten. Good-bye till then."

She was off in an instant, flying back to her open gate with all the grace of a young gazelle.

He stood silent on that picturesque road in the lovely twilight. The mountains on each side rose majestically in their purple robes, and the low firs growing up the slopes gave them the appearance of being draped in heavy velvet. The air would have been silent had it not been for the long boom of the Atlantic waves that forced themselves through the narrow lough.

"This is the land of romance," he said. "One breathes it in with the atmosphere. . . . Some fool said that it is the romantic incidents in life that are horrid. What a fool he was! . . . And yet . . . well, we shall see how things turn out, and then I shall be ready to pronounce a definite

opinion as to whether romance is pleasant—or diabolic."

He walked on quickly to the castle and entered the large hall.

"Here comes the rascal himself, and if he denies the truth of my story, Major Ainlie, I will force the falsehood down his throat."

It was Captain Kenney who was the speaker, and it was Captain St. Maur whom he had just addressed as Major Ainlie.

"Look here, my good fellow, what is all this I hear about you?" inquired St. Maur as the man in corduroys took off his cap quite respectfully in the presence of his superiors.

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CHAPTER VIII

"MIND you, I'm very sorry, Major," said Captain Kenney, addressing St. Maur, "that anything should have occurred to interfere with the good feeling that I hoped would be maintained between us. I meant to hold out to you the right hand of good fellowship."

"That was very kind of you, sir," said St. Maur.

"Hang it all, Major, are we not brothers in arms? We are both military men, and the sacred bond of comradeship——"

"Have you any commands, sir?" asked the man in corduroy, interrupting somewhat abruptly the outburst of eloquence in which Captain Kenney was about to indulge.

"There you are, Major—that bears out what I have been telling you regarding the fellow's rudeness," cried Kenney. "You see, he did not hesitate to break in on what I was saying."

"Henry, a most serious charge has been brought against you by this gentleman," said St. Maur.

"What gentleman, sir?" asked Henry.

"Captain Kenney—this is Captain Kenney," said St. Maur.

"Oh, you said a gentleman, and yet you meant Captain Kenney. Is it a wonder that I was puzzled a bit, sir?"

"You rascal! I have a great mind to break every bone in your body," cried Kenney, advancing with his cane upraised.

"Have you any commands, sir?" said Henry, turning his back upon the man and addressing St. Maur.

"Now, my dear Major, you can see from the attitude that the rascal assumes that he is all that I assured you he was," said Kenney.

"By the way, what is this you said he was?" asked St. Maur.

"Yes," said Henry; "what is it that you said I was?"

He had stepped to the stag's head on the wall, and removed the stout riding-crop that was suspended from the antlers.

"What is it that you said I was, Captain Kenney?" he asked again.

The Captain seemed to think it well to retreat a few steps, getting beside St. Maur.

"You see, he has the effrontery to threaten me in your presence, Major," he cried.

"I see indeed, but what can I do?" said St. Maur, with the air of a man making an apology. "I ask yourself, Captain Kenney, what can I do?"

"Order the fellow to put down that riding-crop, and then kick him out of your house—out of your service—that is what any man in your position should do."

"I am much obliged to you for telling me what I should do," said St. Maur. "But where should I be if the fellow turned upon me with his riding-whip when I made the attempt to kick him out?"

"Great heavens, sir, are you terrorised by your own servants?" cried Kenney.

"Not as a rule," replied St. Maur; "but this person——"

"Have you any orders, sir?" said Henry.

"You see that, Captain Kenney. I can do nothing with the fellow. By the way, you have not yet refreshed your memory as to what you called him before he returned."

"Hang me, if ever I saw such a household!" said Kenney in a whisper. He was plainly bewildered. "Major Ainlie," he continued, turning to St. Maur, "I came to you as one gentleman to another, to tell you of the disgraceful way your servant behaved to me."

"If my memory wasn't so bad, Captain Kenney, I might be able to do justice to your complaint," said St. Maur. "But surely you can tell me what you called the fellow? Tell me now, was it an infernal scoundrel, or merely a vulgar bully?"

"Yes, that's the question," said Henry, grasping the hunting-crop firmly at the business end and taking a step towards the Captain, who retreated in proportion.

"Major Ainlie, when I came here it was in a spirit of conciliation," he said. "I said to myself, 'Whatever he may be, he is still a gentleman, and he will understand when a gentleman lodges a complaint against one of his servants,' but what do I find?"

"A flea in your ear, Captain, eh?" suggested St. Maur.

"Sir?"

"Captain Kenney, as you call yourself, you are the luckiest man I ever came across," said St. Maur coolly. "This man Henry found you offering a gross insult to a lady, and yet you retain whole bones; you come to me with a trumped-up story, and yet you are not kicked out of this house. Now be off with you before your astonishing luck changes—it is bound to change, you know—no man

could continue to have such a run of luck—it would be a scandal if he did."

Captain Kenney became frantic. He clenched his hands, and shook his fists—keeping close to the door all the time—at St. Maur and the man named Henry. He danced before them in fury, not forgetting to edge toward the exit in case he might have to use it in a hurry. He declared that if a vulgar English interloper like Major Ainlie thought that he could bully an Irish gentleman, whose family was on the level of the highest nobles in the land, and escape scot free, he would soon find out his mistake.

"By all the powers, 'tis yourself is the lucky man, Major Ainlie," he cried—in his excitement he lapsed into the brogue of an Irish peasant. "'Tis in luck ye are this day; if we were living in the days of my grandfather, General Terence Kenney, I'd have the chance of calling you out and shooting you as I would a dog."

"And you know something about shooting dogs, don't you, Captain Kenney?" suggested Henry with a rather provoking smile. Patsy had told him a story respecting Kenney's exploit when shooting one day with young Mahony—an exploit which ended in the death of an excellent setter.

This reference was too much for the man. With

a stamp of the foot, and spitting out an oath, he left the room, banging the door behind him. But he could scarcely fail to hear the yells of laughter that came from St. Maur and Henry, both of whom seemed to be seized with an uncontrollable fit of mirth. Captain Kenney could scarcely be expected to appreciate this, for, as a matter of fact, he had never felt less inclined to laugh in all his life. He swung his stick among the thick leaves of the trees bordering the carriage drive, sending them down in showers.

"The insolent upstarts! The mushrooms! They fancy that they can insult a Kenney with impunity," he cried. "I'll convince them of their mistake one way or another. If not by fair means, by others that I know of. Oh, the hounds!"

He checked himself at this last expression, but just a little too late. It was certainly by an inadvertence that a remark bearing upon anything canine came from him.

He did not recover his equanimity until he was within his own house, and had swallowed a large tumbler of whisky with a trifle of water in it. Then he took off his coat, and felt with his forefinger for a part of his shoulder that was causing him considerable inconvenience. The abrasion was the result of his being dealt with so violently

by that insolent, but undoubtedly athletic, young gamekeeper an hour or two before. He had fallen with considerable force, first against the trunk of a tree overhanging the path through the glen, and afterwards against a crag whose jagged teeth certainly stood in great need of being filed. He took off his collar and pulled down the neck of his flannel shirt in front of a looking-glass ; and then he found that he had sustained not one bruise but several. The result of this scrutiny was not to restore his equanimity, and for the next quarter of an hour the elderly woman who acted as his housekeeper and cook, and the lad who discharged the duties of bootblack, housemaid, valet, and groom, were compelled to listen to as choice a collection of swear words combined with threats as they had ever heard, although they had been in the service of Captain Kenney for some years.

On the evening of the next day Ainlie and his friend had just returned from a prolonged shoot over a new part of the mountain, and were drinking tea in the hall, recalling, as usual, the notable misses of the day—there was nothing to say for the hits ; they spoke for themselves — when young Singer, the Constabulary officer, appeared. He had already become very friendly with Ainlie and St. Maur.

"Take a cup of tea, and we'll tell you how the Moyglas Moor did for us," said Ainlie cordially. Singer had predicted great results from the shooting of the Moyglas Moor on the south side of the mountain.

He accepted the invitation, saying—

"I came here strictly on business, but business is always something that can be made to wait if judiciously treated."

"And you are the man to treat it judiciously, I'll swear," said St. Maur. "But I cannot see what business you can have with either of us. If you say that Sullivan has turned up again, and you want us as witnesses against that well-meaning, but unfortunate, patriot, all I can say is——"

"Oh, set your mind at ease," said the officer. "We'll take precious good care that Sullivan never appears again in this neighbourhood."

"Is it a gun licence or what then?" asked Ainlie.

"I suppose I have to tell you at once," said Singer. "The fact is that a fellow in this neighbourhood has fallen foul of a keeper of yours—a man named Henry."

"Oh, indeed—Henry—what is his surname?" asked Ainlie.

"I understand that Henry is his surname. The man who swore the information does not know anything more than that his name is Henry," replied Singer.

"And who is the swearer of the information, and what is it about?"

"A man named Kenney—a fearful rotter—a fellow with the brevet rank of captain, conferred on him by a billiard-marker in Dublin—you know the sort of man?" said Singer.

"I believe I do; he is by no means a rare specimen; there are thousands of the same breed in England, and as many in the colonies. But what does he want with me?" inquired Ainlie.

"Oh, he wants nothing from you, except your keeper—this Mr. Henry I spoke of just now. I'm afraid I must go through the form of arresting him, unless you give me assurance that he will not leave the country until he is served with a summons," said the officer.

"But I have no keeper named Henry, either Christian named or surnamed," said Ainlie blandly.

"What! Are you quite sure?"

"If it will satisfy you better I'll take my Bible oath on it, in the language of the servants' hall. Ask St. Maur there."

"I'll take two Bible oaths on it," said St. Maur. "I'll swear it on the Koran, the Talmud, the works of Confucius, and over the broken saucer—any way you please—that no keeper named Henry is or has been in the employment of Major Ainlie for the last five years. Does that go far enough back for you?"

The inspector looked puzzled; afterwards he brightened up.

"I'm deuced glad to hear it," he said. "I will not ask you what keepers you have in addition to those that Maguire got for you, but——"

"But you may ask me if you please," said Ainlie. "Why should I do more than I have done to set the back of the natives up against me? It would be the act of some one more asinine than myself to import an English keeper at this time of day. What would such a chap know about an Irish shooting?"

"You mean to say that you have no English gamekeeper?"

"I happen to have four at my little place in Hampshire, but they are all pheasant men. My poor old dad had allowed the pheasants too much recreation for the last ten years before he died; and now it takes four keepers to keep them in order. You don't suppose that I should start life in Ireland

with a high-class pheasant man from Hampshire? He would give me a month's notice the day after his arrival. I have really no keeper but Patsy for the river work and O'Neill and his cubs for the mountain. I am quite satisfied with these, such as they are."

The officer lay back in his chair and roared with laughter.

"I'm jolly glad to hear that that fellow has discovered a mare's nest," he said. "Here's the information that he swore before two magistrates. They had really no option but to grant him his warrant—here's the warrant—for the arrest of the man who violently assaulted him without any cause or reason."

"And he affirms that the assailant was an English keeper in my employment, named Henry?" said Ainlie.

"Read for yourself," said the officer.

Ainlie took the document which Singer handed to him; it purported to be the sworn information of Timothy Kenney of Ardmore in the parish of Oughan, gentleman, and it affirmed that the said Timothy, when walking on the previous evening in a public place, to wit, Garron Glen, in the said parish, was set upon and murderously assaulted by a man in the garb of a gamekeeper, whose name was subsequently

discovered by the said Timothy Kenney to be Henry, Christian name unknown, and his employment to be that of a gamekeeper in the service of Major H. de C. Ainlie, at present residing at Rathdearg Castle, whereby the said Timothy Kenney was grievously hurt and wounded and went in peril of his life, etc., etc., etc.

"I see," said Ainlie. "All you have got to do in the matter is to find this man Henry, and arrest him."

"That's all; and if the man does not exist, it seems to me that I've a pretty fair job of work before me," said the officer.

"Anyhow, you can do nothing in regard to arresting the man, the fact being that Ainlie has no keeper named Henry in his employ," remarked St. Maur. "So now you may smoke this cigar with an easy conscience."

Singer took the proffered cigar, saying—

"There's no one gladder than myself that the thing is a fizzle. Everybody shunts that bounder who calls himself Captain Kenney."

"He goes a good deal further than to call himself 'Captain'—in that document he calls himself 'gentleman,'" said Ainlie.

"It appears to me that that is a characteristic Irish document," remarked St. Maur. "The man

who was insulted describes himself wrongly, and he describes his assailant wrongly."

"Well, I'm absolved from the duty of arresting any one," said the officer. "I thought it better to come to you in the first instance before sending a couple of my men for the imaginary murderous assailant."

He lit his cigar, but before he had thrown away the match a puzzled look came over his face, while he said—

"By George, it has just occurred to me that the fellow stated that he had come here last evening, and had seen Major Ainlie and accused his keeper in his presence, and that Major Ainlie behaved rudely toward him—Kenney, I mean."

"He is economical of the truth," said Ainlie. "I admit that he found his way into this very place where we are sitting now, but I assure you there was no gamekeeper present. All that he did was to abuse me soundly. What was it that he called me, St. Maur?"

"A ruffianly bully—that was one of his flowers of speech," replied St. Maur.

"I like his impudence! And you did not give him the order of the hoof? It would have been more to the point if you had sworn an information against him for making use of language

calculated to lead to a breach of the peace. Well, if lies were landed property, he would be one of the largest holders of real estate in the world."

"He went away in a howling rage, but I really did not think that he would have the cheek to—to concoct such a document as you have shown us," said Ainlie. "By the way, some one told us—I believe it was Patsy—that this man Kenney was on friendly terms with Mr. Mahony."

"Mr. Mahony was, I believe, foolish enough to borrow money from him at one time, and during the past few years he somehow obtained a stronger hold upon the old man—I don't know the particulars, but it had something to do with the hurried departure of the son," said Singer.

"Oh, this is interesting," said St. Maur.

"The fact is that Kenney has for some time been mad enough to entertain a passion for Miss Mahony," said Singer, laughing.

"Oh, there is a daughter as well as a son? Of course, I remember now that you told us—or was it Maguire?—that there was a daughter. And the young woman could not be prevailed on to accept his disinterested devotion?"

"She has always detested him," replied Singer. "If you had ever seen Miss Mahony you could understand how ridiculous is the idea of such a rotter as

Kenney thinking to find favour with such a girl. She is one of the handsomest girls in Ireland at the present moment, and that is saying a great deal, let me tell you."

"It is. I have been in Ireland before, and I know something of the subject," said St. Maur. "And has he been hoofed out of the Mahonys' house yet?"

"I'm sorry to say that Mr. Mahony has never had the courage—perhaps not even the disposition—to hoof him. He must have known that the influence the man had upon his son was for bad, and yet—well, I told you that I believe he has some secret hold over Mr. Mahony. The old man is certainly afraid of him."

"Why don't you—the constabulary—find out the whole business and finish this Kenney off?" asked St. Maur. "It strikes me that you could scarcely be better employed than in investigating a matter like this."

The officer shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"The matter is nothing to me," he said. "If Mr. Mahony were to swear an information to the effect that he had been thrashed by Kenney and went in fear of his life in consequence——"

"Red tape! It seems to me that Dublin Castle is as bad as the War Office in this respect," said

Ainlie. "And I did think that Ireland, at least, was free from anything like this."

The Constabulary officer laughed. A short time afterwards he went away, and the moment he was out of the castle, Ainlie and St. Maur lay back in their chairs and roared.

CHAPTER IX

MISS MAHONY kept her promise made to that mysterious young man named Henry, though, as might have been expected, he had to wait at the Falls for some time before she appeared.

He thought he had never seen a more beautiful picture than she presented to his eyes, dressed as she was in her neat and serviceable tailor-made gown, with that cap to match. When he saw her boots appearing at the edge of her short skirt he wondered how many girls could be so blind to their own interests as to wear their high-heeled patent leather things when they could buy stout boots with thick soles that were of as beautiful a shape as those she wore.

He perceived in a moment that she was not so cordial in manner as she had been during the last five minutes they had spent together. She was now polite—somewhat distant—almost frigid. She greeted him as a very polite young woman would greet a keeper who was to attend her. There was no question of shaking hands with him now.

He was not disappointed. He could see that she had been thinking over the question of the promise which she had given him to have this day's fishing in the river, now owned by the man who had deposed her father—the man for whom neither she nor her father could have any regard—and that she had come to the conclusion that she had been too impulsive in the matter. He thought this, knowing that he himself had also been thinking over her attitude, and that this was the conclusion he had come to—she had been too impulsive, but he alone was to blame for it. He had, he felt, acted ungenerously toward her, taking advantage of the service which he had done her to urge her on to accept the courtesy which, he said, Major Ainlie had offered her. He felt that his asking her to have this day's fishing was equivalent to saying—

"I have done you a good turn in saving you from the insults of the man who has just gone up the glen, and I ask you to do this for me in return."

He felt that he had forced the girl into a corner, as it were, and it was rather more than ungenerous on his part to do so. He was sure that her cold courtesy now was the result of her having thought over the matter on the same lines. She nodded to him, saying "Good morning," when she arrived, but there was no smile on her face.

He touched his cap in reply to her greeting, and said—

"Good morning, miss."

Then she handed him her rod to put together; and in doing so she spoke no word and seemed to take only the smallest amount of interest in the transaction. He took the joints of the rod from her and examined them. Without looking at her he said—

"I wonder, Miss Mahony, if you have come simply because you promised."

"What do you mean?" she asked quickly. It seemed to him that there was more than a suspicion of irritation in her voice.

"What I mean is that I have been thinking of the way you gave me your promise, and the time—the occasion. I feel that it was very good of you to—to—to say all that you said—but——"

"I didn't say very much, did I? and I do not care to be reminded of what I said. Here I am. I will take my rod when it is ready."

She spoke quickly but without irritation.

He did not answer her at once. He was untying the little fastenings of the joints, and taking a long time about it. At last he said—

"Yes; I feel that I took a great liberty in saying anything to you about the river just at that time.

I believe that you came to the same conclusion when you began to think about it."

"I didn't begin to think about it at all," she said. "The thing was too trifling. I have other things to think about. Has Major Ainlie been saying anything?"

"Nothing whatever."

"You told him that I had agreed to come to-day?"

"Certainly. He was more than pleased; but since then he has been thinking over the matter, and——"

"What a deal of thinking over matters you must go through at the castle just now; and what trivial matters occupy your thoughts."

"At any rate, he is under the impression that you promised to come solely because you were good-natured and thought it would be discourteous to refuse. I agree with him, and I feel that it was too bad of me to introduce the subject when I did. I have a fancy that you felt in a way bound to come."

"And if I did—still I am here now, waiting for my rod."

"Yes; but you are still free to go away if you wish, before you throw a fly."

She looked at him as if she were startled, as

indeed she was, by his suggestion. She continued with her eyes upon him for a long time before speaking. Then she smiled, saying—

"Upon my word, I am beginning to think that you and Major Ainlie are the most singularly sensitive people I ever met—and, by the way, I have only met one of you. Most men would be content to take my coming without further question, and without giving a second thought to such trifles as how I was induced to promise to come; but you and he—I had no idea that men were so scrupulous. Suppose I were to tell you to pack up my rod again?"

"I am afraid that I should do my best to induce you to stay. Still, if you should——"

"You puzzle me, Mr.—that is, Henry. You see how puzzled I am when I lapse once more into calling you 'Mr.'"

"Pray how do I puzzle you, Miss Mahony?"

"You puzzle me so that I find myself talking to you as if you were—well, as if you were not a keeper—more as if you were Major Ainlie's private secretary. I do that because you took that tone with me."

"I had no right to do so—miss."

When he made the pause before saying the "miss" she burst out laughing. She had now

lost all that cold dignity with which she had begun the morning.

"I can't understand why you laugh, Miss Mahony," said he.

"If you could have heard the way you said that 'miss,' you would certainly have laughed yourself. You said it as if you were quite unaccustomed to the housemaid's way of addressing the young ladies of the family. Perhaps you are, you do it so badly."

"And so I am—that is the truth," he said. "You see, Major Ainlie and I have been always together, and he has no sisters. But may I say, Miss Mahony, that you have only yourself to blame for any freedom I may have shown in speaking to you; you should not have shaken hands with me. Don't you think that that was enough to throw me off my balance?"

"Very well; I'll not do it again, if you blame me for putting you out of your place," said she. "I only shook hands with you once. Did you notice that I did not do so when we met just now?"

"I should have been greatly embarrassed," said he.

"You seem to be so in any case, or you would not be spoiling that line of mine."

He was abstractedly weaving the slack of her fishing-line about his fingers.

He smiled, saying—

"You can easily see that I am unaccustomed to be treated by people above me in my station in life as you have treated me. But may I remind you that you have not given me an answer to my question?"

"What question?"

"I said if you had come to the conclusion that you had too hastily promised to fish in this river, there was still time for you to change your mind."

"Don't talk nonsense, my man," she said in a very Irish way. "It is perfectly clear that you do not know very much about girls—Irish girls in particular, or you would never suppose for a moment that one would give up a day's fishing simply because she had an impression that she had made a rash promise to accept something that she loves better than anything in the world. Give me the rod. I can manage with my own fly."

He handed her the rod in a very humble spirit, and without uttering a word. He watched her take a fly from her book and tie it on with a deftness that he envied.

"I suppose Patsy gave you a few hints about the river, Henry," she remarked.

"A good many, miss," he replied.

"As many as he thought good for you," she said. "You need not think that Patsy will give away any of his own special secrets. Did he take you to the Stone of Dunesk, I wonder."

"I think not. We kept about the Falls, and in the afternoon he brought us to the Grey Pool. We did very well."

She smiled.

"It may have seemed very well to you," she said. "But I'll lead you to the best place for salmon in Ireland, and if you bring Major Ainlie to it, take my word, he will be beholden to you."

"I thought you were going to say he would be sure to raise my wages," he said, smiling grimly.

"I know that you English are very fond of money; and I have heard that the English gamekeeper is the most avaricious of all men," said she, walking along the bank of the river, working at her reel all the time.

"I could do with an extra shilling or two," said he. "But I hope you will not try to tip me, Miss Mahony."

"You may rest perfectly assured that I will not hurt your sensitive feelings in that particular way," she replied. "We are as poor as church mice. But even if I had my pockets full of gold I some-

how do not think that I could offer you half a crown."

"Why should you cut me off like that?" he asked.

"Well, I suppose it is because—you—that is—oh, I can't tell you, but I feel that you would throw my money in my face or chuck it into the river or do something like that."

"But I should do nothing of the sort," said he. "On the contrary, I should——"

"Put it in the savings bank? Are you a savings bank sort of man? I don't think that you are."

"I am sorry to say that I have not opened a savings bank account."

"Then you should do so. How are you going to provide for your old age?"

"There's something in that. May I ask you if you would recommend me to try the Post Office Savings Bank or one of the ordinary kind, Miss Mahony?"

"What, you are actually applying to an Irish girl whose father is stony for advice on the subject of thrift? Oh, Henry, you should know better than to do anything so foolish. Now we must stop talking if we wish to hook one of the monsters of the Stone of Dunesk."

They were approaching a part of the river to

which Patsy had certainly not taken either Major Ainlie or Captain St. Maur. The stream made a sharp bend, and then suddenly broadened out in a complete network of rapids, shallow and not swift. But further up the river narrowed considerably, and the waters swept and swirled round a great boulder in midstream.

"That is the Stone of Dunesk," said the girl. "It is the best place on the whole river. The fish, you know, rest themselves in the pool just beyond the stone before going further up the river, and they are ready to take any reasonable refreshment that may be offered to them. You'll see something of salmon fishing if you watch any one who understands the dear things at this place."

"I'm going to watch you," said he gently.

"You'll find it to your advantage," said she. "I don't believe there are any salmon rivers in England."

"That's why I—why Major Ainlie comes to Ireland," he answered.

"I feel that I am a traitress to my country in showing you this place," said she. "Even Patsy was a better patriot than I, for he said nothing about it."

"He wasn't going to give it away to the Saxon invader? And do you think that Major Ainlie

or his keeper would not have found it out without Patsy's help ? "

" Not they. I ask you if it looks promising ? "

" Well, certainly not as promising as the rapids a little further down. I can assure you that the Major was quite satisfied with the sport he had there a few days ago. Nine and fourteen pound fish are not to be despised, Miss Mahony."

" I'll show you something better. Crouch down behind that old trunk, and don't so much as sneeze until I need you. We're going to have a day's fishing, I tell you."

He laughed at her frank Irish mode of speech, and went to his crouching-place, behind the gnarled stump of a tree, the roots of which clung like snakes to the edge of the river bank—a perfect place for a man to wait to land a fish.

Then she threw her fly so cleverly that it just skimmed the surface beyond the big stone, and considering that it was a matter of forty feet, he marvelled at her success. He felt that she had spoken the truth—they were going to have some fishing that day.

And they had.

Inside a quarter of an hour she had hooked a five-pounder—a wonderfully game fish that kept her busy for three-quarters of an hour. He admired

the way she played it; she had unlimited patience, showing that she understood thoroughly the nature of the fish; yielding to its fit of temper, tickling it out of its sulks, but never letting it presume too much upon her good nature.

He was kept busy with the landing-net, hurrying from one part of the bank to another, when it came close, and doing his best to refrain from frightening it at a critical moment.

He flattered himself that he did his landing in a style that was worthy of her fishing. The fish had slipped into a dark place well under a high part of the bank, and he showed his presence of mind and the extent of his resources by hastily throwing the strap of his basket over a branch of a tree, and lowering himself gently down by one hand to where there was a precarious foothold an inch or two above the water. After hanging in this fashion for a long five minutes, he was just able, by tickling the water with the rim of the net, to start the salmon out of its sulking-hole, and the next instant he had the net under it.

He passed up the handle of the net to her, and then hauled himself up by his strap, and stood breathless beside her.

"Bravo! Bravo!" she gasped. "Oh, you did magnificently! Yes, magnificently—for an English-

man. No, I withdraw my reservation. I will say that I never saw a fish more cleverly landed."

"And I can swear that I never saw one more ably played," he cried. "It was the gamest fish I ever netted. It had the spirit of a twenty-five-pounder."

She seated herself for a rest on the low branch of the tree from which he had swung himself down. He remained standing as a matter of course.

"Where did you ever see a twenty-five-pounder salmon caught?" she asked him. "Not in England, I am certain."

"No, not in England; in Norway," he replied.

"Oh, Major Ainlie took you with him to Norway?"

"Wherever he went I went too. But after all, salmon are tame things compared with tarpon."

"What, have you been tarpon fishing?"

"Only one year. I should like another."

"Six feet long they are, I have heard."

"I have hooked them as long as six feet six; but the greater number are from five to six feet."

She swung her foot backward and forward as she sat gracefully yielding her body to the bend of the bough. He felt that he had never seen anything so graceful before.

After a short silence she sighed.

"It must be a delightful thing to be rich," she said.

"So I have always thought," said he. "But I am content with what I get."

"And how much is that? Oh, I beg your pardon. I have no right to be curious."

"Why not? I am sure that every district visitor in our village in Hampshire asks the keepers' wives what wages they get."

She gave a little petulant shake of her head. "I am constantly forgetting that you are a keeper," she said.

"You had much better not, or I may forget it too," he said in a low tone.

She gave a little start and looked at him strangely.

"What can you possibly mean by that?" she said after a pause. But before he had a chance of replying, she had got up on her feet, saying—

"What nonsense one does talk sometimes! Let us get on with our fishing."

"Yes; we must not forget our fishing," said he slowly.

She seemed to think that somehow it was necessary for her to throw herself heart and soul into the business of fishing.

"I want a big fish," she cried. "It's all very well

to have half an hour's play over a five-pounder. I want a noble fellow of five pounds and two other five pounds to the back of them. Just a year ago I hooked a twenty-pounder behind that rock, but he got off."

"Who knows? Perhaps the same fish may be waiting for you to-day in the old place," said he. "You must hook him and land him to-day, Miss Mahony."

"He is very artful," she replied, tying on a new fly, while he took in the slack of her new line on the reel. "He knows that if he gets into a hole there is on the far side of that stone in the middle of the river, one may keep hauling away at one's line from this bank without producing any effect on him. Now if there was a ferry-boat to take me across I believe I could manage him. Still, a twenty-pounder is a very big fish for such a river as this."

"It takes a deal of killing," said he. "But we can only do our best."

She cast her fly almost as tenderly and with as loving a regard for the susceptibilities of her fish as before, and almost immediately it was jumped at by a small salmon, but it swung at that instant just an inch too high for it, and the fish flopped back into the water.

"I would not have touched it," she whispered,

smiling. "It was only a three-pounder, and I have set my heart on a twenty."

An hour had passed before she got another rise, and once again this came from a small fish which she landed easily. Another hour passed very tamely.

"I am disappointed," she said. "This is my last throw here. I'll shift my quarters in another minute."

Before she had more than spoken, there was a tremendous splash in the water. Her reel went whiz and whirr, and she went flying along the bank trying to keep pace with the fish and prevent too abrupt a check, which would certainly have cost her her fly and her fish as well. The man with the net was able to push her line clear of one tree, and when it caught upon another, he was in time to break off the obstacle with his foot, thus freeing the line. On along the bank they raced together; and then the fish sulked in a deep pool, and she reeled in as fast as she could; but before she had got in half a dozen yards the salmon was off in the other direction; it was dashing down the stream as rapidly as it had gone up, and out went her line with another whirr.

Before it reached the rapids the fish sprang into the air and showed itself to be a huge salmon—a certain eighteen-pounder.

"It is my old fish, and it is making for its old place," she shouted as she rushed past the man with the gaff.

"Try it with a gentle check!" he cried.

"Too late—too late," she said as the salmon went with a flash across the river, not three inches from the surface—and round the fatal Stone of Dunesk. "It's gone—lost!" she almost sobbed as her line went over the stone. "Oh, if I could only get to the other side!"

"You can!" he shouted.

In a second he had leapt into the river up to his waist. He held up his arms to her on the bank above him.

"Jump!" he cried.

Without the pause of a second she jumped, rod and all, straight into his arms.

CHAPTER X

OF course her feet went into the water; it rushed over her ankles, but happily those strong high boots which she wore, and which he had so admired earlier in the day, were waterproof; and he took good care that her dress was never in the condition of the plume of Sir William of Deloraine, "draggled by the dashing spray." He held her in his arms as delicately as if she were an infant, and, taking a dozen strong strides, deposited her on the big flat boulder known as the Stone of Dunesk.

She scrambled to her feet in an instant. She had not loosed her hold upon her rod, nor had he loosed his upon his gaff. She was reeling in furiously before he had pulled himself up to her side, releasing her line where it threatened to be tangled, so much of the slack was among the thick weeds. The salmon felt the check and off he went again, but only to return to the pool. For half an hour he pursued the same tactics, making a dash among the

stones of the rapids thirty or forty feet away, and then shooting back at the first check, to lie sulking in the deep pool or among the weeds of the further bank. Three times her rod was bent within an ounce of the breaking strain, until at last she held it out to him, saying—

"Take it—take it, and have a try—I am done out!"

"Not I—not I," he shouted. "Hold on to the rod. You'll manage it in a minute. Coax him back gently."

"Oh, my arms are done for; but if he escapes me I shall die!" she gasped.

"Don't give up!" he shouted. "Let him sulk if you are too tired."

But the salmon had no notion of sulking to oblige the tired fisher-girl. It flung itself over the rapids once more, and once more the rod bent in an arch, and the girl staggered, leant back, and at last sat down on the boulder. In another second the rod was straight again. She thought that the fish had freed itself; but it was only making another of its frantic rushes back to its old place. She worked at her reel furiously, and before she quite knew what had happened the great fish was lying beside her, and the man with the gaff that had done the business was standing

up to his knees in the water that swirled around him. The salmon had, in its blind fury, rushed through the weeds into the only shallow patch between the boulder and the bank, and the second that it remained there was enough for the man with the gaff.

There lay the fish gasping beside the gasping girl. She looked at it in something akin to astonishment, mechanically turning the handle of her reel. Her face was beautifully flushed, and her charming cap was all to one side, and as for her hair—strands of it were half-way down her back. There she sat, the serviceable but sodden boots protruding a long way out from the edge of her gown. She made no conventional attempt, such as would have been made by most other girls, to tuck in her feet, though she knew that rather more than an inch of her stocking was exposed. There was no affectation of conventional modesty about her; and he knew that she agreed with him that such an attempt to be conventional in the circumstances would have been absurd—out of keeping with the scene and the excitement of the moment.

He clambered back to the boulder, and forthwith four distinct streams of water came from his boots, and, flowing over the surface of the stone, trickled into the river whence they had come with him.

"Well, I hope you are satisfied now," he said, laughing, and now there was in his manner none of the deference which he had shown to her in the earlier part of the day. He spoke to her as an equal.

And was it strange that she should not notice this—that she should be quite unconscious of anything in his bearing which should not have been there?

At any rate, she treated him as if he were her equal—with a frank heartiness which came quite natural to her, and was undoubtedly congenial with their circumstances.

"It is the biggest fish that I ever caught in all my life, and it made the finest fight. But I should never have managed it without your help," she said. "Oh, I never saw anything so clever as your gaffing of it. I saw it make a rush for the reeds, and like a flash you had landed it! And you made me hold on—your words gave me fresh strength."

"I knew that you had it in you," he said. "I knew that it would not be you who would give up the fight at that critical moment."

"Who would have given it up with such encouraging words as you spoke?" she said, smiling. "Oh, you were far more than encouraging; you were commanding. I never before felt what it was to be commanded by a man."

He laughed shortly, and the next moment became grave.

"I hope you will pardon me—miss," he said.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, man, do not call me 'miss' just now," she cried quite petulantly. "I would a great deal rather that you called me Kathleen—Kathleen, I tell you, just as I call you Henry—yes, I believe it would sound much more respectful than your horrid housemaids' 'miss.'"

"Whatever I may call you, you may be sure that there is in my mind nothing but respect for you," he said. "If I were to call you 'Kathleen Mavourneen,' I should only be paying you a humble tribute."

"You do not know what mavourneen means, or you would think yourself a little—a little—foolish," she said, smiling.

"I know what the song means, anyway, and I think—with the greatest respect, mind—that you are like the song of 'Kathleen Mavourneen' made visible."

She looked at him straight in the face for some moments, and he looked at her straight in the face—not boldly, but with the deepest respect in his eyes. She felt herself blushing furiously.

"What a funny thing to say!" she cried. "I wonder why you——"

She spoke seriously; but she interrupted her own sentence with a ringing laugh that had rather an artificial note in it.

"If you could only see how you look!" she said by way of explanation. "Those knickerbockers of yours must have absorbed half the river; so keep away from me. I don't wish to be washed off the stone. I am so sorry; but you are really half drowned."

It seemed as if he had all this time been quite unconscious of the fact that from his chest downward he was like a saturated sponge; for now he looked as if he were surprised when his attention was called to his appearance. He glanced down at his overflowing boots and then roared with laughter.

"I had no idea that I was like this. I had forgotten all about the water. The excitement of hooking that splendid fellow was too much for me."

"You might say 'for us,'" she said. "I feel that I have reason to fall back upon the plea of my excitement to excuse—a good deal. I don't really know how I allowed myself to be so carried away."

"Carried—carried away?" he said.

Once more she blushed and gave another uneasy laugh. Then she became serious.

"I had no time to think," she said demurely.

"And—isn't he a splendid fellow? Twenty pounds if he is an ounce!"

She laid her hand upon the portly body of the salmon.

"He must be quite twenty," he said. "And I am sure that you cannot doubt that he is the one who tricked you last year."

"I am perfectly certain that he is," she cried. "Didn't he try exactly the same trick that I told you of—getting behind this stone? I never should have caught him if you hadn't helped me."

"But you did catch him; that is the main thing—the only thing," said he. "And you may take my word for it there are not three girls besides yourself who could do all that you have done to-day."

Her face beamed with delight at his commendation. Then she looked at the fish, saying in a low voice—

"If you had said 'would' instead of 'could' I might be disposed to agree with you."

"I don't care which way you put it," he said. "The main thing is that you had courage—courage—spirit—perseverance, and—well, there's the fish. It looks nearer twenty-five than twenty."

Then he seated himself close to her on the big flat boulder—she had motioned him to do so; he was too well-bred a keeper to venture to do so

of his own accord—and began to look after her tackle. Of course, the line had got a tangle here and there, and equally, as a matter of course, his hands were unequal to the task of teasing out such tangles. She saw his very poor attempt and shook her head.

"You will never manage it that way," she said. "You must pick at it more—I'll show you how."

He brought the line to her and knelt before her while she put in her little fingers among his big ones, and the result was that their fingers became entangled for several seconds now and again, but the fishing-line remained in its previous condition. It was not until she took it into her own hands, to the exclusion of his, that the knots yielded to her persuasion.

He reeled up the line and thrust the end of the rod into a crack in the stone. And then they sat together nursing their knees.

"I think I know now how people feel after a battle," she said. "One has a sense of success—of having done something to make one feel content. Will you not smoke?"

"I am thinking of lunch," said he. "After I have eaten something I might have a pipe, if you will allow me."

"Lunch?" she cried. "Then it was lunch

that you brought in your basket? I have been wondering all the day what was in the basket—I thought that perhaps it might be some new sort of tackle, or maybe a spare landing-net—you might fancy that the fish would wear one out. Do you know I am rather glad that the basket holds lunch. I am quite ready for anything in that way. Are you?"

"Quite. I hope they have given us something nice," said he, looking in the direction of the basket, which was plainly visible on the river bank.

"Did you not pack it yourself?" she asked.

"Major Ainlie gave orders for it to be packed, and one of the servants handed it to me," he replied.

"It was very kind of Major Ainlie," said she. "I really think that he means to be friendly. I wish my father would be more reasonable than he is."

"It is merely a matter of time," said he. "You need not think that Major Ainlie will be prejudiced against him because he holds out against the interloper. And now for lunch!"

He jumped up and stood looking across the swirling water that separated him from the lunch basket.

"Yes," she said slowly; "now for lunch!"

Her voice had not the note of enthusiasm that rang through his when he made the same exclamation. But, like him, she sent longing eyes across the water.

"Can I lend you a hand, Miss Mahony?" he asked; for she had made no move.

"Oh, thank you, I can manage for myself," she replied. "I only felt a little stiff in my arms after my fight. You see, I am in very poor condition; I have not had a decent day's fishing for close upon a year."

"It will be your own fault if you have not plenty of days here while the season lasts," said he.

She shook her head.

"It would be impossible," she said. "I have no right to be on the river that does not belong to me. I feel like a poacher."

"If you only knew how pleased Major Ainlie would be, you would——"

"You speak too confidently about Major Ainlie. But no matter how courteous—how generous—how benevolent he may be—I have an idea that he thinks of himself as benevolent—I must still feel that I am only on his river on sufferance. What right have I to be here, keeping him away from the sport that he loves? No; I'll not come again."

"That is wholly a matter for yourself, Miss Mahony. One thing is certain—if you die from starvation here to-day, you will never come back. There is the lunch basket waiting for you."

She turned her back upon the basket and upon him. She stood looking down into the hole where the salmon had sulked. For fully three minutes she remained in that pose, and the only sound that broke the stillness of the grey day was of the water splashing against the smooth face of the Stone of Dunesk and the purling of the rapids in the distance.

He began to whistle in a very low tone, with his hands in his pockets.

"Perhaps you would wish me to fetch the lunch basket to you here," he suggested.

She turned upon him quite suddenly.

"I don't want any lunch, thank you," she said.

"Nonsense!" he said with a laugh. But recollecting himself in a moment, he added, "I beg your pardon, Miss Mahony. I did not mean to be disrespectful; I only meant to say that—that—well, that it would be unwise of you to neglect your lunch because you have caught a twenty-pound salmon."

"I don't feel particularly hungry, and—let me tell you that I am the best—the only judge of what I wish for, and what I don't wish for."

"I don't quite agree with you," said he. "What would Major Ainlie say if he knew that you had refused to eat the lunch that he ordered?"

"I don't mind what he says. Am I bound to take Major Ainlie into my calculations?" she cried.

"Of course you are bound," he replied. "Miss Mahony, I have heard it said that Irish ladies are the most tactful in the world—the most sensitive—the most appreciative of all points referring to good taste. Now, if you go away without having lunch, will it not be just as if a friend invited you to lunch, and you got up and left the table the moment the first course appeared?"

She frowned.

"You will not be able to say that I got up and walked off, leaving the lunch on the table," she said. "I may get up, but am I to walk into the water?"

"I would not allow it, even if you were foolish enough to make the attempt," said he.

"I am afraid that you could not prevent me if I once set my mind on doing it," said she.

"Tell me what troubles you, please, Miss Mahony."

"Can't you see that what troubles me is that I am here—on this stone in the middle of the river, and that I cannot jump to the bank where the lunch

basket, that I am dying to eat, is waiting for me?"

He laughed at the idea of her eating the lunch basket; but he checked himself in a moment, saying—

"Surely you can get to the river bank by the way you got here. Do you fancy that it matters much to me whether I wade another ten yards or refrain? A drowned rat——"

"You had very much better hurry up to the castle and change your things. If you catch your death of cold you will blame me ever after."

"I would not be so unjust, even if I were then in a position to throw the blame on any one. Well, if you are determined to stay where you are, I hope that you won't blame me if I leave you now."

"I wish you would leave me. I do not know what could have possessed me to make such a fool of——"

"Of me? Please do not say that. I do not consider that I have been made a fool yet; but —well, good day to you."

She gave a little cry of dismay as he sprang into the water and waded to the bank. He never looked back at her, and she had a painful sense of isolation when she found herself alone with her salmon on the great boulder. Once she was at the

point of calling him back and begging him to carry her to the bank, as he had carried her from it half an hour before; but her spirit prevailed against her woman's weakness, and she was silent. Still, the thought that she would have to get ashore just as he was going was an unnerving one.

She watched him climb the bank and go to the lunch basket, opening it and taking out some of the contents in their dainty white napkins. The sight of those neat parcels made her feel absolutely famished. She felt that, after all, he was no more than an ordinary water-bailiff, in spite of the pleasant manner and the superficial manners which no doubt he had acquired by a long association with men who were gentlemen. She felt that she had been a fool to object to allow him to carry her ashore in cold blood. She had not objected when she was excited; but now, after all, he was only a water-bailiff, and any girl might without reproach avail herself of the services of such a person—servants do not count—but somehow she had endowed him with qualities that made her think of him differently, for a time; but now—should she call him back?

She did not need to call him back; he was coming. He was wading back to her, carrying the lunch basket above his head.

"Why did you do this foolish thing?" she cried when he laid it at her feet.

"It would have been as much as my place is worth to return to the castle with the lunch untouched," he replied. "I do hope that they have given you something that you can eat, Miss Mahony."

She was silent. She watched him unfold the parcels of sandwiches—all of the daintiest—she watched him lay out a salad bowl with the most appetising bits of lobster nestling among the green lettuce, and a tiny pasty, and then she saw him struggling with the screw lid of a strange tin thing. When he succeeded in mastering it, he turned out a marvellous pink ice with frozen strawberries about it. Then came a little bottle of some white wine.

"What a lunch basket!" she murmured. "Only you should not have . . . but you do not suppose that I will eat these things by myself, Henry?"

"I will take what you leave, Miss Mahony," he said.

"You shall eat with me, or I will not touch a thing," she cried.

"Your good nature carries you away," he said.

"Oh, do not talk about being carried away," she cried. "I never sat down to a more appetising lunch.

Everything is most delightful. There is no skeleton at the feast."

She did not see the face of a man who, from a hiding-place among the low trees of the further bank, was watching her as he had watched her for the previous hour, or she might not have enjoyed her feast so amply as she was doing.

But the man was there watching her—the man whose shoulders were still raw from the treatment he had received in the glen a few days before.

CHAPTER XI

SHE noticed with some surprise that Henry confined himself to the caviare sandwiches, and that he put half a dozen olives on his plate. She had always taken it for granted that caviare and stuffed olives were an acquired taste, and a taste, too, not easily acquired. And yet here was this man—this gamekeeper—water-bailiff, or whatever he was, thoroughly at home with these delicacies. She perceived at once that Major Ainlie had given him a very bad training—allowing him to have such things from his own table. But, perhaps, she thought, in such establishments as the one of which Major Ainlie was the head, the caviare and olives and other delicacies of that type which were left from the master's table, were regarded as the perquisites of the upper servants.

A flood of light seemed to be thrown by her observation of this detail upon the apparent anomaly of the man beside her. It became clear to her now that, by his intimate association with

Major Ainlie, he had acquired not merely the manners and the way of speaking, but also the tastes of gentlefolk. She felt that however bad for the man this might be, it was for the moment agreeable enough for herself: it was much pleasanter to eat with a man who used his knife and fork properly. She felt that if he had tucked his napkin under his chin and taken his jelly off the blade of his knife, she would have been ill at ease in his company.

As it was, she made a most excellent lunch, and chatted away as freely and as gaily as if no such problem was looming in the near future, as to how she was to get off the island on which this picnic was being held.

The only matter which caused her some anxiety had reference to the man's saturated garments; but he assured her that he had never made a practice of catching cold by such means. He had often been wet when deer-stalking in Scotland, he told her, and as for South Africa—why, every day he had been subjected to much more powerful cold-producing agencies without suffering the smallest discomfort in consequence. In one of the compartments of the lunch basket he found a small phial of whisky and another of brandy, and at her request he swallowed the contents of one.

She chatted with him for half an hour after

they had finished their lunch, and she found that he had travelled far and wide, and he differed from some travellers whom she had met in being able to interest her in the places that he had visited. She began to wonder how this man, who confessed that he had been a soldier, could have had such experiences; and she said so to him.

"Oh, the explanation is very simple," he replied. "You see, wherever Major Ainlie went, I went too—in fact"—and here he gave a laugh—"I think I may say without boasting that we were inseparable."

"I think that whatever Major Ainlie may be, his judgment in choosing a companion is excellent," said she. "I am sure that he made a companion of you."

"*You* have done so, at any rate, Miss Mahony," said he quietly. "I wonder what you think of me."

"I think you are a right good fellow, Henry. I never wish to meet a better," she said, and he saw that her face was rosy while she spoke, and had she not turned away her head at that moment she would have seen that he too, beneath his bronze, was blushing.

He took off his cap.

"I want no higher praise," said he. "And it seems all the greater to me because I have a

feeling that you are not the sort of girl—the sort of young lady——"

"Oh, bother the young lady! I am a girl!" she cried.

"Well, you are the sort of girl who would not make a companion of every one that came along. I wonder if that is not part of your nature."

"I believe that it is," she replied. "I have been accused before now of being unresponsive in the matter of friendship."

"Of course I did not presume to think of the word friendship in my case: I hope that I know my place," said he. "But—isn't friendliness very near to friendship? And you have been very friendly, Miss Mahony."

"I am sure that every one is friendly in regard to you—every one except my father," said she.

"Oh, he only found me disrespectful because I was the bearer of a letter that set his back up. Perhaps that letter was a mistake on the Major's part."

"I can't think so; it has been the means of giving me a splendid day's fishing, at any rate."

"Then our day is over?"

"Could we do better than we have done? Do you fancy there are many more twenty-pounders waiting to be hooked?"

"I suppose it would be too much to look for."

He got up on his feet, saying—

"I wonder if it would be possible to get a boat—any sort of a boat—that would carry you ashore. Or would you wish a bridge built?"

"Two years ago there was a flat-bottomed box that people called a cot at the cabin of the widow Gleeson," said she. "You must know the widow Gleeson."

"Everybody knows the widow—what did you say her name was?"

"Gleeson. She used the thing as a ferry-boat. The skeleton of it may be still in existence—enough to float."

"Up the river or down?"

"The cottage? About ten minutes' walk beyond the boreen—you could not miss it."

"The boreen? And pray what is a boreen, Miss Mahony?"

"A narrow lane. It is on the left as you go up."

"I'll find it, never fear."

Once more he was wading ashore. She watched him with a pang—a little twinge of conscience. She was a nice girl, and she felt that she might have allowed him, without doing herself any particular injury, to carry her ashore. She had not hesitated to jump into his arms when he called to her. To

be sure that was when the excitement of the battle with the salmon was upon her; still, she was nothing the worse for the adventure, and why should she have become so squeamish now?

She watched him running along the bank; and then, in a flash, a dreadful question suggested itself to her. A voice seemed to ring out through the still air taunting her. Good heavens, how could it be possible that she—she who had refused the offer made to her by a most eligible peer with a long ancestry, and, what is better still nowadays, a long purse—she who had always been regarded by her friends as only one degree above the temperature of ice—how could it be possible that she should feel towards a gamekeeper—a water-bailiff—whatever he was—as she had never felt in regard to any of the men who had asked her for her love?

Oh, the thing was impossible. The fact was that she was too fond of outdoor sports—fishing, and sailing, and riding, and she confused the liking which she had for the comradeship of a man who had proved himself possessed of those qualities that she admired most in a man—she confused this liking with—well, with something that was, or at any rate should be, quite different. She had heard of foolish young women running away with their grooms—some with their music teachers. She had always

thought of them as silly creatures; and was it likely that she, Kathleen Desmond Mahony, the daughter of one of the greatest Irish families, would . . . . . oh, the idea was ridiculous!

And having thus come to a logical conclusion on the matter that was whispered to her by that little, but persistent, inward voice, she, Kathleen Desmond Mahony, the daughter of one of the greatest Irish families, sat down on the great boulder and burst into tears.

The outburst was violent and vexatious, but it did not last long. It left her rather *triste*, however, and she looked mournfully at the remains of their feast and at the many silver cases of the lunch basket which lay scattered about the herbage of the big rock. Everything suggested refinement and good taste, and, in noticing them, she actually began to feel a liking for the unseen Major Ainlie, who was certainly the provider of the feast of which she had partaken. She felt that he must be a really nice man—a man of good taste and good feeling.

If any one had told her that her sudden liking for Major Ainlie was due to her knowledge of the fact that he had made a friend of Henry the keeper, treating him as an inseparable companion, she would have laughed in scorn at the suggestion.

And this musing mood of hers, abounding as

it was in variations, now took the form of a certain petulance in respect of Henry the keeper, or whatever he was.

"Why did he leave me alone in this place?" she said. "If by some mischance Major Ainlie were to be walking alongside the river—nay, if any one were to come along the banks and see me here, what would they think? He had no business to leave me here. He should have insisted on my allowing myself to be carried to the shore. Why, I scarcely made any resolute objection, and yet—what on earth made me tell him anything about the boat?"

So she went on from one mood to another, keeping an eye ever on the watch for his return, and praying that neither Major Ainlie nor any other stranger should appear upon the scene to gaze at her, possibly through an odious eyeglass, and to inquire in an English drawl how she got upon that isolated rock.

Half an hour had passed before he returned. She saw him toiling along the bank with a rope over his shoulder, towing the most miserable-looking craft that had ever been afloat. The widow's cot was like the caricature of a boat. It had the aspect of being constructed out of a packing-case; and its progress could only be

described as a series of wobbles, with an occasional lurch as the tow-rope gave it a jerk.

She laughed heartily at the appearance of the thing, and it seemed that her laughter was borne along the water to the ears of the man who had turned himself into a draught horse, for he raised one hand in acknowledgment of her salute, and then he too laughed loud and long.

But knowing as she did a good deal about boats, she knew that towing such a craft down a river with many bends was no laughing matter. Fortunately there was some current in the river, and he was clever enough to know how to utilise it to keep the head of the crazy craft out from the bank. Still, the job was anything but an easy one.

"I am sorry that I was so long over the business," he called out to her, when he had drawn the cot to the most gradual slope of the bank. "The widow Malone——"

"The widow Gleeson," she corrected in a high soprano.

"Gleeson, to be sure. Well, whatever her name may be, she was not inclined to lend her gondola to a stranger, and when I told her it was for your sole use, and asked her how you were to get off the stone if she refused her aid, she replied,

'Let her get off it the way she got on it.' How could I explain everything?"

"With a silver shilling," she cried.

"That was the very coin—just twelve times the insurance value of the craft," said he, stepping down to where the front part of the boat—it would be ridiculous to term it the bow—had grounded, and proceeding to bail out the water that it contained, by the simple process of turning it on its side.

She watched him, and the thought that was in her mind was that there was not another man in the world who would have done all that he had done to save her from—from what? From resting for about thirty seconds in his arms.

She gave a little cry of protest as he once again stepped into the water, pushing the cot before him.

"Why did you not step into the thing yourself?" she cried.

"I wouldn't trust it," he said. "In any case, it wouldn't float with both of us aboard."

He pushed the thing to the lee of the stone. She handed down the lunch basket to him, and he himself slid the salmon down the smooth stone into the bottom of the cot. He waited on the edge, holding up a hand to help her into the frail craft. But here she made a pause.

"Leave go, please," she said, making a motion toward him. He took his spare hand off the boat. She put her foot down to the rickety gunwale as if she were about to step in, then she gave it a sudden push off with her toe and sent the thing lurching toward the bank.

"I am like you," she cried to him; "I don't trust it."

The next moment he had her in his arms, bearing her tenderly to the shore.

He retained her only a minute longer than was necessary, while he said—

"We must have another day together—don't you think so?"

She was a little fluttered—a little flushed when he set her on her feet.

"You are undoubtedly very strong," said she, smiling.

"Am I strong enough to induce you to try another day on the river?" he asked her.

She shook her head.

"There can never be a finer salmon waiting for me," she replied.

"There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it," said he. "At any rate, you will come and have a try?"

There was a pause before she said—

"Don't you think that you are rather too free in your invitations to Major Ainlie's salmon fishing?"

"I think nothing of the sort, Miss Mahony," he answered. "I know that the more frequently you fish in this river the better pleased he will be."

"Have you that direct from himself?"

"Direct—I give you my word. Shall we say Saturday?"

"If you are sure that—oh, why should I not come a dozen times if I like? It is ridiculous to make a fuss over such a trifle. Yes, certainly—Saturday. Only I don't think that I feel inclined to try the Stone of Dunesk so soon again."

"Why should you not? Think what luck you had there to-day."

Again there was a long pause before she said—

"Luck? Had I? Well, perhaps——"

"If you are not satisfied with a twenty-pounder, and an old friend at that, you are hard to please."

"And so I am—hard to please. Don't talk to me of luck. Good-bye. If you do not mind I think I should like to try my luck at the Rathmore Falls on Saturday."

"I dare say you are right. At any rate, you know the river and I don't."

"It strikes me that you have made a more intimate acquaintance with it than ever I did. I do hope that you will not awake with a cold to-morrow."

"What about your salmon?" he asked, taking the fish out of the cot that had drifted to the bank—he had already rescued the lunch basket. "Shall I have it sent home for you?"

She shook her head.

"I dare not let a fin of it appear in my father's house," she replied. "This was a surreptitious joy to-day. I know it was wrong to deceive my poor father; but I came in the hope of atoning to Major Ainlie and you for my father's rudeness."

"You have amply atoned, believe me," said he. "And that will allow of your coming on Saturday solely to please yourself. But if you will not take away your own fish, you must let me know to which of your friends you would like it sent by to-night's train. It will be delivered to-morrow evening."

"I should dearly like it sent to a friend of mine who happens to be in London during this month—Mrs. Walland," she said.

"It shall go to her without a moment's delay," said he.

"But you do not know the address?"

"Isn't it 390, Grosvenor Place?"

"How on earth do you know that?"

"The Wallands are friends of Major Ainlie. Trust me that Mrs. Walland gets the fish.'

"Thank you. Good-bye."

"Till Saturday."

Thus they parted. He had not even a hand to spare to touch his cap—the salmon was suspended from the one, and the other held the strap of the lunch basket. That solved the question of their shaking hands. He knew that while a young woman belonging to one of the greatest families in Ireland may not give a second thought to the act of a keeper in carrying her half-way across a salmon river, she may see no reason why she should shake hands with the same man when she is parting from him after the day's fishing.

On the whole, however, this man Henry saw no reason to complain of his luck during the day's fishing, although most men would be likely to complain at being compelled by the force of circumstances to wade up to the waist in a river upon three separate and distinct occasions within an hour, and to have had no chance of drying their soaking garments or sodden boots.

He must have communicated something of what he felt to Major Ainlie, for the latter was in the

highest spirits when he enjoyed his pipe by the side of his friend Captain St. Maur that same evening.

And the girl—what were her feelings as she took her way homeward?

If some one had met her and asked her in the politest way possible to describe in some detail her feelings at this particular time, she would have found considerable difficulty in complying with the request. One minute she felt that she had never had a pleasanter day in all her life. She liked salmon-fishing above every sport, and she had just succeeded in capturing the finest fish that had ever been known to come out of that river. That reflection was a source of great gratification to her; but she had more to think about than the capture of the record salmon, and her reflections on the other matters were not quite so well defined. There was, for instance, that incident of jumping, not once, but twice, into the strong arms of the man who was acting as her attendant—a consideration of the point caused her more than a little perturbation. She could not understand how it was that she had done that bold thing a second time. The man showed by his procuring, at great personal inconvenience, the boat, or the substitute for the boat, that he understood that it would be impossible for her to allow herself to be borne across

the water in his arms a second time. And yet she had deliberately shoved away the boat and put herself into his arms.

She blushed again at the very thought of that transaction. She felt shocked at her conduct; and the worst of it was that her conduct was inexplicable. She could not say for the life of her why she had behaved so. Oh, the whole affair was a mystery.

On entering the house her father met her with an open cablegram in his hand.

"Desmond is on his way home," he said. "He sends a cablegram from Capetown saying that he will be home in a fortnight."

"Will he be safe?" she said in a low voice. "Did you not hear that there was a warrant out for his arrest?"

"So there was. That is doubtless why he adds, 'No word to a soul' in his cablegram," said Mr. Mahony. "God help us! if he is arrested it will kill me."

CHAPTER XII

WHATEVER troubles of her own Kathleen Mahony may have had—and she certainly had one or two—they were now lost sight of beneath the shadow of the impending difficulty in regard to her brother. She knew what a trouble and expense this careless, clever, foolish brother of hers had been to his family, as, indeed, did every one in the neighbourhood of the castle. He possessed every characteristic of the traditional Irishman. He was a daring horseman, a crack shot, and an inveterate gambler. Money seemed to slip through his fingers; he took no account of it. One day he had his pockets full; the next they were empty, and he could not say where a single sovereign had gone. Kathleen knew to what extent he had contributed to the ruin of their father and the stopping of the payment for the mortgage interest on the castle and the estate. She recalled very vividly that morning three years ago when Desmond had come to her room to say

a whispered good-bye to her. He told her that it was necessary for him to fly the country; a warrant was out for his arrest, and though he was an innocent man—he swore that he was innocent—the evidence against him was so overwhelming, his friends had advised him to fly.

She remembered how she had pressed him with questions; but he had told her that she could not understand—he himself did not understand. Forgery! Was it likely, he asked her, that he would try to forge the name of any one? but he had certainly sent the bill to the bank, and the amount had been placed to his credit. A warrant was issued for his arrest, and he must fly—his best friends advised him to do so. But he was innocent—of that she might rest assured—he was innocent of any attempt at fraud.

That was the last she had seen of him. He had gone to South Africa under an assumed name, and he had written to her to tell her something of the fighting in which he had taken an active part until the end of the war, when he had been lucky enough to drop into an extremely good billet. Like many of his fellow-countrymen, he had turned over a new leaf in a new land. He was getting a good salary, he said, and had been twice promoted within the year. He was doing his best to make

up for the follies of the past, and he meant to keep his billet, for it suited him down to the ground.

This was the substance of the last letter she had received from him, and it had cheered her up for a long time, for she felt confident that he would keep his promise and redeem the past. And yet there stood her father with the cablegram in his hand telling her that Desmond was to return within a few weeks.

"Why is he returning at this time?" she asked. "What on earth can he mean by it?"

"Madness—it seems to me to be sheer madness. Bravado—it may be bravado, but it is not the less madness," replied her father, flinging down the cablegram and then throwing himself into a seat with his face turned away from her.

She saw how greatly disturbed he was—disturbed and perturbed; so she did her best to comfort him, though she knew that however strongly he felt the foolishness of Desmond's intention to return, his feelings on this point could not possibly have been stronger than her own.

She went behind him, and laid a hand tenderly upon his shoulder, saying—

"There may be something behind it, father; he surely would not be so foolish as to throw up

his good post and run the chance of being arrested here unless he had some reason for it."

"Madness! bravado! nothing else," muttered her father. "Reason has nothing to do with his intention—it never had anything to do with Desmond. He is throwing away the best chance of his life, just as he threw away every other that he had since he left school. It is his nature—he can't help it. He inherited it—that want of stability which is our curse."

"Don't talk that way, father," she said. "I refuse to believe that Desmond would be foolish enough to——"

"Then you are wrong," he cried, turning almost fiercely upon her. "I tell you that you are wrong if you do not believe him to have an unlimited capacity for folly. He is only acting at this time consistently with his past in flinging away his chances."

Kathleen thought it better not to say anything more. It was clear that her father had no intention of being soothed by her; and, as a matter of fact, the conclusions to which she had come on the subject of her brother's latest move did not differ materially from those to which her father had given such forcible expression.

She was silent; but after a brief pause Mr.

Mahony, leaning forward in his chair, with his chin upon one hand while the fingers of the other kept tapping nervously upon his knee, muttered—

"I shouldn't wonder—no, I shouldn't wonder if he had been repeating at the Cape his performance here."

"What performance?" she asked.

"You know what performance—that performance which forced him to fly from the country to avoid being arrested as a felon," he said.

"Oh, father, you must not talk in that way," she cried. "How often have you not said that you knew Desmond would never do a dishonourable thing?"

"Perhaps not wilfully," he replied. "He may not have done anything wilfully, but all the same he did enough to bring himself within the meshes of the law. He was a poor weak fool—that is what I have always maintained—to allow himself to do something that in the eyes of the law was a criminal offence."

"How do we know that he was guilty? His last words to me were that he was innocent."

"Innocent men do not decamp. That is what every one said—I know that just as well as if I had heard them—innocent men do not decamp. A warrant was issued for his apprehension—that is

enough for most people. At any rate, it was enough for him—enough to send him flying."

"He was advised by Captain Kenney to go away. Desmond's own instinct was to remain and face the charge, whatever it was."

"Kenney was the only one competent to give him advice; he was the only one who knew all about the affair from first to last."

"That may be; but I have always had a feeling, and it has been increasing of late, that he was foolish in placing any dependence on the counsel of such a man as Captain Kenney. Who would follow the advice of Captain Kenney on any matter—any ordinary matter—to say nothing of a matter of life or death—a matter that meant a crisis in one's life?"

Her father turned upon her with a sudden gesture of irritation.

"I know in what light you regard Kenney," he said. "You have always been unjust toward him."

"Perhaps I have," she said. "But, on the other hand, is it not possible that you are prejudiced in his favour?"

"I don't think much of Tim Kenney," said he; "but his father did me more than one good turn, and I won't believe that the son of such a father

could ever forget that he was an Irish gentleman. The Kenney family——"

"Oh, I am tired to death of hearing about the past greatness of our families," she cried.

He looked at her gravely, sorrowfully, for some moments, but just as he was beginning to speak, she broke in upon him.

"You know what I mean, father," she said. "You should know that everybody outside Ireland nowadays only laughs at the talk of being descended from chieftains or people like that. Captain Kenney has descended a pretty long way even from his father whom you respect. I'm sure that no one could have much respect for his father's son."

Mr. Mahony might have retorted with effect that she had gone a pretty long way from the subject of her brother Desmond and the purport of his cablegram, but instead of doing so he was foolish enough to become extremely angry and to bemoan his ill-luck as a parent. What had he ever done, he requested some invisible mentor to tell him, that he should be the father of such children. After an apostrophe in this strain, which would have read like a translation from a Greek tragedian had any one been at hand to take it down as it came from his lips, he turned to Kathleen, saying—

not in the declamatory style, but only in the pained colloquial—

"I thought that you at least, Kathleen, would be mindful of your position and its responsibilities, however your brother might have forgotten them; but I now perceive that, like him, you too have flung to the winds all the most cherished traditions of your race. You have disappointed me. I looked to you for sympathy in my trouble, but you have shown yourself incapable even of appreciating my simplest feelings."

She had flung her arms about his neck and was weeping with her head on his shoulder before he had finished his bitter words.

"Forgive me—forgive me, dear old dad!" she sobbed. "Indeed I did not mean to say all that I said—I did not mean all that I said. You know that there is no one who thinks more of our family than I do; only—I cannot bear to hear even the name of that horrid man. And when I think that it was solely upon his advice that Desmond ran away, I—oh, I lose all patience!"

She almost pushed him away from her as she spoke her last sentence, and throwing herself into the chair from which he had risen, she continued to weep with her face down upon her hands.

"Come, Kathleen," said her father in a voice

that had a certain note of affection in it—a sort of grieved affection. "Come, you are not yourself to-day. It is no wonder. The news that that boy is at the point of making a fool of himself again, when we were hoping that he had at last turned his back upon his old courses, was too much for you. Never mind, we shall talk over this melancholy business at another time, when we have had time to think of it in all its bearings. Just now it has come upon us with all the suddenness of a blow."

"Yes, yes, that is it," she said eagerly. "The suddenness—that is it—the news startled me, coming as it did when I am tired—overstrung. To-morrow we can talk it over quietly."

He shook his head sagely and sadly.

"Unfortunately there is no chance of my having mistaken the meaning of the cablegram; he is on his way home," said he. "I do not want to hear anything worse than that plain piece of news."

"Don't let us talk about it, dear father," said she. "It is too terrible that we, his own flesh and blood, should think of his home-coming as something to be dreaded."

He did not shake his head this time, but his face wore the expression of a man who has, by a great effort, refrained from shaking his head, and every

one knows that this expression goes a good deal further than a mere shaking of the head, in suggesting a foreboding of evil things.

Kathleen went slowly to her room, the window of which looked straight out upon the Atlantic. She stood for some time in front of that window, thinking her thoughts. She had just been made aware of the most important piece of news respecting the brother to whom she had been devoted, and she knew that his return to Ireland could not fail to mark a crisis in his life—a crisis (one of many) in the history of the family to which they belonged. Could any more serious step be imagined than the return of a man against whom a warrant has been issued on a grave charge—his return to the very scene of his questionable act? Could any greater calamity fall upon his family than his arrest, even though he might eventually be able to prove his innocence?

There could only be one answer given to such questions as these; and yet Kathleen Mahony, looking out to where the sun was sinking through a faintly luminous haze into the grey Atlantic, was not at that particular moment conscious of any feeling of apprehension. As a matter of fact, every thought, every consideration, whether of family crises or less absorbing incidents, was com-

pelled to give way before her consciousness that she had passed one of the happiest days of her life. She felt—though she would have been greatly surprised had any one revealed it to her—that on the chance of spending another such day, she would have been ready to cut herself off from her family, from all the associations which had made up her life down to that moment when she had gone to gaze out of her window.

She abandoned herself for a time to the delight of thinking how delightful the day had been. Every incident of the day came back to her, and she relived for half an hour all that she had gone through: first, on the bank of the noble river; secondly, on the broad rock in the midst of that river; and thirdly, between the river bank and that rock.

At the recollection of the moments that she had passed *in transitu*, so to speak, she felt herself blushing, not merely as to her face, but all over her fair body.

It seemed quite incredible to her now that she could ever have allowed herself to be so carried away by the excitement of the sport as to permit herself to be carried away by the man—the play upon the words which had been suggested to her all the time, seemed to her then to possess a certain element of genial humour, and she remembered

that she had given a laugh while flushing momentarily at the idea. Good heavens! she had actually given a laugh at it, and in the presence of the man! To be sure she did not forget that she had blushed as well; but this recollection did not help her to feel less horrified, for she knew that at that time she had not passed beyond the faintest carmine tinge. It was not the pæony-flush, such as flashed all over her now as she re-lived those moments which she had passed between the stone and the river bank.

And the worst of the matter was that the feeling uppermost in her consciousness now—pæony-blush notwithstanding—was that those moments had been all too brief!

Never had this girl been so brought face to face as it were with one of the many problems of life which cause young women of a thoughtful turn of mind to feel that life is full of mysteries—a perfectly just conclusion to come to, by the way. Never before had she been guilty of an act which on reflection assumed a very different form from that in which it had originally come before her.

And still, shocked and all as she was at the levity with which she had greeted the incident that had now become the centre of all her reflections, as the sun had become the centre of that luminous

golden haze dropping down to the Atlantic, she could not disguise the fact that she had just spent one of the most delightful days of her life, and that the most interesting of all its incidents was——

The cord of her window-blind dangled against her hand as she leant against the casement, looking out. She gave the cord an impatient pull that brought the blind down with a rush. She turned away with an exclamation of something more than impatience, and flung herself upon her little sofa at the further end of the now dim room.

"What an idiot I was!" she said, not in an inward whisper, but out loud, as though she was accusing some one outside herself for an act of reprehensible folly. "I was an idiot—no, I wasn't —I wasn't an idiot; I am only one now—now, to allow myself to feel that there was anything in that—that simple thing! He did not take any absurd view of the affair! He was not such a fool! He saw that a girl may allow a servant to—to help her in a way that she would never think of permitting another man. . . . He was quite respectful—quite nice. He saw at once that I was too excited to mind. . . . But he had no business to hold up his hands as he did, inviting me—compelling me—yes, he compelled me—to trust myself to him. . . . Presumptuous! . . . No, he was per-

fectly respectful, and then . . . Oh, what on earth possessed me to kick away the boat when he brought it? What will he think of me now?"

The thought that the gamekeeper or water-bailiff or whatever the man was, might possibly acquire the impression of her as a forward, almost an immodest girl, was greatly disturbing to her, until she reflected upon what was a fact, namely, that there was no necessity for her to see the man again. What did it matter to her that a gamekeeper in the employment of Major Ainlie should get a wrong impression of her? There was no need for her to address a word to him again, and in the course of a month or two he would have left the neighbourhood and would most likely never cross her path again.

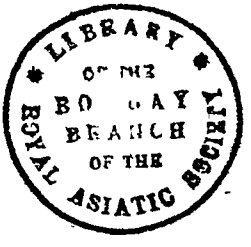
This was the course that was taken by her reflections. They should have brought consolation to her. Unfortunately, however, they did nothing of the sort. They left her feeling quite melancholy at the suggestion that the day which she had spent with the man of whom she was thinking might never be repeated, even making allowance for variations incidental to the scene and the weather.

It was good for her that her father talked all through their dinner of Desmond and the dreadful possibilities connected with his return, thereby pre-

venting her from indulging any more for that evening in that form of self-deception known as introspection. The conversation about Desmond served as a sort of fender—a ship's fender—to prevent her from coming to grief over the shock of thinking further in a ridiculous strain of the man into whose arms she had trusted herself twice during the day—once in the excitement of the chase of the salmon, and again in cool blood (as she fancied).

And the consequence of it all was that, by the time she got to her room at night and went to bed, she had made a resolution never again to see that man whom she had called Henry.

But she did not go asleep as soon as she should for all that.



CHAPTER XIII

THE first thing of which Kathleen was conscious in the morning was that she had made a very silly resolution before going asleep the previous night. The fact of her having made such a resolution—of having found it necessary, as she fancied, to make such a resolution—weighed heavily upon her. Why on earth, she asked herself, had she been led to make up her mind to decline to keep the appointment to fish in the river on the following Saturday?

It only required a few minutes' reiteration of this question to impress upon her that such a resolution was not merely silly, it contained in addition the germs of a very gross insult to her intelligence as well as to her sense of her own position in the world. It whispered that she was closely akin to those foolish young women of whom she had frequently read—young women who had fallen in love and run away with their own grooms. She had never been so obsessed as her father had always

shown himself to be by the idea of the greatness of the family of Mahony, but at the same time she had never forgotten that this family had once been among the greatest in the country; and certainly never before the previous day had she suggested either to her father or any one else her impression that she was tired of hearing of the greatness of the Mahonys. And yet before she slept she had found it necessary to make that resolution to refuse ever again to meet the English servant of an upstart Englishman.

The morning light had shown her how ridiculous had been the train of thought that had led to such a conclusion. Why should she not meet the man every day of the week if she so pleased and if he chanced to come in her way, she asked herself; and she certainly was conscious of a little thrill at the thought of meeting him every day. He had been quite respectful, even at the most exciting moment of the day she had spent in his company. He had "remembered his place"—that was the phrase of the servants' hall which came into her mind in this connection—yes, he had carried her in his arms across the river in as respectful a way as ever man had carried a woman. Once before she had had a similar experience. She had been stranded twenty yards from shore in a fishing boat,

and at her father's request the middle-aged fisherman had waded to the beach with her in his arms, and afterwards with her father on his back. Now upon that occasion the man had been an Irishman, and yet he had not discharged his duty in the silent and respectful way of the Englishman. He had said something about his luck and of his willingness to spend the rest of his days knee-deep in the water if only he had such a "darlint" in his arms. She had laughed at that time, and had added materially to the man's pleasure by slapping him quite hard on the face when he squeezed her, calling him some name in the Irish tongue which signified a Don Juan.

Now she had not thought it necessary to make a resolution never again to see that susceptible Irishman; on the contrary, she had taken many a sail in his company, and he had frequently asked her when she was going to give him another such "thrate" as had been his when the boat had been stranded.

What a contrast was this familiarity on the part of the Irishman with the demeanour of the Englishman, who had been equally obliging in helping her out of a similar position and so preventing her from being inconvenienced! The man Henry had had the good taste to ignore the unconventionality of

the act, and so far from making any suggestion as to having had a "thrate," he had been at the trouble to wander for half a mile up the river in order to obtain the means of conveying her to the bank without making it necessary for her to submit to be carried by him. It was she herself who had been guilty of yielding to that foolish impulse by which she found herself in his arms again.

Once more she felt herself blushing at the recollection, and before the sensation had passed away she had sprung out of her bed and pulled up the blind, which she had drawn down so impatiently the evening before. She flung her beautiful long hair back from her shoulders with a variation of her former expression of impatience.

"Psha!" she cried, "I am a greater fool this morning even than I was last night to continue thinking of something that is not worth a single thought. Of course, I'll go again to the river, and I can only hope that we'll have half as good a time as we had yesterday. Oh, that splendid fellow—twenty pounds—more—more—he was the biggest salmon that ever sailed over the falls, and I caught him; and maybe I'll have his elder brother on Saturday! Oh, why isn't to-day Saturday?"

That was her mood now. There were as good

fish in the river as ever came out of it, she reflected; and she made up her mind that, for the sake of putting the proverb to the test, she would keep the appointment which had been suggested to her by that very capable and certainly most respectful man—she thought once again of how very respectful he had been—who had landed her fish so adroitly for her. Having made up her mind to this effect she felt that she had done much to remove the obloquy incidental to the insult which she had put upon herself by her resolution of the previous night.

So greatly absorbed had she become in the question of the river she had actually lost sight of the important family question which faced her when she got downstairs and, glancing through the little porch, saw her father pacing the lawn with head bent, his hands clasped behind him.

The sight of him brought back to her with a flash the purport of the cablegram which he had shown her on the previous evening; and then, by a strange freak of memory for which she would have found it difficult to account, there came another flash which showed her the very respectful keeper turning his back upon her father in a rather disrespectful way upon the first occasion of their meeting. Yes, he had walked with her part of the

way to deliver Major Ainlie's courteous letter to her father. She remembered how impressed she had been by the man on that morning, and she was glad to recollect that she had taken the trouble to write an apologetic letter to him, though she had at that time no notion that he would ever become . . . . . .

She started with fright when she saw the direction in which her thoughts were hurrying her, and she was standing with that expression of alarm upon her face when her father strode through the porch, and he noticed it at once.

"My poor child, I can see that you have had a wretched night—almost as bad as I had," he said. "There is a look of apprehension on your face which tells me much."

She felt ashamed of herself. What a daughter she had been! What a sister! Instead of giving all her thoughts to the question of Desmond's return and the possible consequences of such a piece of folly, she had passed the night thinking of vain trivialities.

But she was a woman, and she felt it easy to acquiesce in his interpretation of her expression.

She shook her head and then smiled in the way that women do when endeavouring to appear cheerful in the presence of men whose weight of melan-

choly they feel it to be their mission—and the men do not contradict them—to lighten.

"It may not be so bad as it seems, father dear," she said. "I am thinking that perhaps—perhaps—oh, let us come in to breakfast. We need not be miserable before there is actual need to be so."

"You were always the one to put a good face on matters, no matter how miserable those matters," said her father. "I wish I could share your happy nature. Have you come to any conclusion in regard to that wretched boy?"

"I refuse to discuss anything of his affairs or of any other affairs until I have had breakfast," said she, clasping his arm as she led him in to the breakfast-room, where a dish of delicious trout awaited them.

"Now, what is on your mind?" she asked him, when she had poured out a second cup of coffee. "Are you still of the opinion that Desmond would be foolish enough to throw up his good situation and come home to run the chance of being arrested?"

"I don't know what to think," replied her father. "The boy has acted so foolishly upon every occasion in the past, especially when he had a chance of doing well, it would be just like him to do this mad thing."

"I don't quite agree with you," she said. "Look

at all the letters I got from him from South Africa —were they a bit like what he would have written a year earlier? They were full of good sense, and they showed that he was capable of looking at things in a very different spirit from what might have been expected by any one who knew all that his life had been."

"And you judge from this that he had at last settled down and was determined to redeem the past?"

"That is just what I believe, and I believe it very thoroughly. Every one acknowledged that Desmond had ability—that he could take any position that he pleased in the world if he made up his mind."

"That is true enough. He found his worst enemy in himself. But what has this got to say to the question? Didn't he get several chances of doing well, and didn't he fling them all away?"

"He never got a proper chance, nor was he likely to get one so long as he remained here. That is the truth. I see it clearly now. From the time he was a child he was taught that the privilege of being a Mahony was so great that it did not matter how he behaved—the rules of life that applied to other people had nothing to do with the Mahonys."

"He was taught what his sister has signally failed to learn—that by birth he holds a position in Ireland equal to that of the noblest in the land."

Her father has started up from his chair and spoke with one arm outstretched toward her—a white forefinger pointing convincingly at her. He had never before found it necessary to assume this highly oratorical pose in front of her; but then she had never found it necessary ever before to give expression to her views respecting the origin of her brother's conduct, although she had held these views for a considerable time. Now, however, that she had said what was on her mind to say, she resisted the temptation to discuss the whole question with her father. She knew how every debate on even the least of the ramifications of this great question of the position of the Mahonys was sure to end. The domestic annals of the family during the thousand years or so of their existence furnished many interesting illustrations of the unhappy results of entering into this controversy. About the time when one Caius Julius Cæsar was making an attempt to civilize the neighbouring island of Britain—his efforts in this direction, supplemented since by those of many other active politicians, have borne very little fruit—the position of the Mahonys was the subject of debate, with battle-mace and

skeen among the picturesque scenery of the west. And when a base-born Norman professional robber was landing with his robber band—most of them base-born, and nearly all of them gaol-birds—and founding the great English aristocracy of to-day, the Mahonys were endeavouring to define their position in Ireland by the aid of poleaxes and the pikes of wood-kernes. So the discussion had, according to the tradition of the family, gone on with fluctuating balances in their favour, until the time of the Danish settlers. The Danish settlers had nearly settled the question in their well-known methods, but after the battle of Clontarf the Family came to the front once again, and was never quite lost sight of when there was any feud being engineered.

The daughter of the Family had been made aware of a pretty fair amount of the Mahony tradition—her father called it history—down to the days of Georgian duels, based upon the necessity for maintaining the prestige of the House, and the result of her recollection of the general trend of all that she had heard was to impress upon her the futility of discussing the exact position of the Mahonys; so she refrained even from smiling at the impassioned oratorical attitude of her father. The modern spirit of conciliation rather than war-waging,

though a tame policy when looked at by the light of the blazing torches which the Mahonys had sent flying through the land, obtained recognition from her at all times, and never more readily than now, when she looked up and saw her father waiting to talk of the Family.

"I am sorry that I said so much, father," she said, but her tone was not altogether one of contrition. There was a good deal of firmness in her voice. She was not without some of the most admirable qualities of her people. She was not afraid of her father even when he was prepared to talk. "I really only meant to say that—never mind what I meant to say—I'll unsay it all. All that was on my mind was that perhaps if Desmond had been somebody else, he might have been—have been different."

A statement less open to controversy than this could scarcely be imagined; but Mr. Mahony was in no mood to accept even the most plausible suggestion as a basis of peace and silence. He remained on his feet in front of her, only with the breakfast-table between them, and with one gesture swept away every suggestion of conciliation.

"A thousand times would I rather see my son suffer all that I have suffered than hear him speak as you have spoken," he cried; and Kathleen,

although she had a very clear impression that her father had not done himself justice in that particular comparison of his choice, still kept silence.

"A thousand times—ten thousand times rather would I see my son a good Mahony than a successful —plebeian—like—like your Major Ainlie!" resumed her father.

She looked up, her face flaming out of all reason, for what had she to do with Major Ainlie?

"What on earth do you mean by that—my Major Ainlie—*my* Major—don't you know that I have never so much as seen that Major Ainlie?" she cried.

"I have not forgotten, though apparently you have, that you championed him in regard to that insolent letter that he wrote to me—that letter which was delivered in the spirit in which it was written by that supercilious keeper," said her father so sternly that he really failed to give full value to his sneer.

But if she had never seen Major Ainlie she had certainly seen the supercilious keeper; but of course she did not change colour at the reference to him.

"I saw no supercilious keeper," she cried calmly.

"Good heavens! did you not bring the fellow here?" he said. "Did you not make an attempt

to apologize to him for what I said—for the reproof——"

"Oh, father, let us cease this wretched bickering," she cried. "You know that to try to pay off your grudge against Major Ainlie upon the keeper was —ungenerous—foolish! The man was—I never knew a more respectful man—everything that he did he did respectfully—I respect him. Whatever may be said about Major Ainlie, who has not yet been seen either by you or me, nothing can be said about the keeper, and I will not have you say anything against him."

She spoke with some feeling, almost with vehemence, and the silence that followed her remark seemed longer than it really was by reason of her warmth. Her father was startled, but he was still oratorical.

"And this is the girl to whom I looked for sympathy in this great blow which has fallen upon our house," he said, turning his eyes toward the ceiling.

"Don't be absurd, father," she said, and this was going further with him than she had ever gone. To be sure she had frequently thought that some of his views and a good many of his poses were absurd, but she had never ventured to say so to his face. Somehow she felt bolder to-day than she had ever felt—bolder and more resentful. She

felt that she did well to be angry on account of his references to Major Ainlie and Major Ainlie's respectful gamekeeper, who had taken to looking after the fishing. She could not forget the excellent lunch which Major Ainlie had permitted this man to carry down to the river the day before. She felt that she had some reason for standing up for him in addition to his keeper. "Don't be absurd," she repeated. "You know that whatever happens is bound to affect me as much as it does you. But I say again that I see no reason why we should look for the worst. Whatever poor Desmond was at home, he showed himself to be—well, something very different as soon as he got among men who were carrying out a great enterprise and putting their hearts into it. They made a man of him, and I can't believe that he would show himself to be so forgetful of all he learned as to come home to be arrested for a crime that he never committed. No; take my word for it, father, he is coming back to clear himself."

The steady confidence which was in every word she spoke did not fail to produce an impression upon her father, though he did his best to resist it. He would have liked another opportunity—an indefinite number of opportunities—of bemoaning the ill-luck which had been so persistent in making

him its victim—of soliloquising upon the downward tendency of his family, and upon various abstractions which present themselves with all too great readiness to a gentleman who has been unable to pay off his mortgages, but who still retains a sense of the value of certain figures of speech; but it was plain that his daughter had no idea of allowing him to get a suitable opening for his oratory. She had become so painfully practical of late that she made a most indifferent audience for his impassioned outbursts; and every one knows that an orator without an audience is on a level with a jockey whose horse has left him behind.

Mr. Mahony shook his head.

"It is a blow—another blow," he said. "Yes, I feel it coming. We have not yet been laid low enough in the dust to please that Fate which has been dogging us for years. That boy is returning to us now only to be arrested and flung into gaol. That will be the last stroke of all—a Mahony in gaol!"

Miss Mahony could not help feeling that many of the historical episodes associated with her family, with which, as has already been hinted, she was familiar, must have done a good deal less than justice to the Mahonys, if her father could not grasp so gross an idea as that of a Mahony in gaol. The most sympathetic student of the traditions of the

family would have felt bound to confess that if now and again a Mahony did not find himself in gaol, the Mahonys were the most fortunate as well as the most ancient of the great Irish houses. She did not, however, say anything of this to her father. She had an uneasy impression—and perhaps it was well founded—that she had not been very kind to him in the course of their conversation this morning: she had certainly got the better of him in whatever points of argument had presented themselves, and there is no greater unkindness that one can do to a man of the temper and temperament of her father than to get the better of him in an argument.

It was the existence of this impression that kept her silent on the subject of the connection between a Mahony and a county gaol—that sordid, if sanitary, modern equivalent to the dungeon of the mediæval castle. The best county families occasionally found themselves consigned to dungeons, and now and again, too, there may occur a connection between a member of a county family and the county gaol; but on the whole it is safest to assume in the course of a general conversation that any connection between the two, except that which is the result of an appointment as a Visiting Justice or a Grand Juror, could not possibly exist.

"Don't talk about a gaol, my dear father," said Miss Mahony, with a very good imitation of the smile with which one waves aside a suggested absurdity—almost an impossibility. "The letters which I have received from Desmond within the past six months are not the letters of a man who would walk straight through the gates of a gaol. No, no; Desmond is not a fool—now."

Her father shook his head. He would not allow himself to be so easily deprived of the luxury of thinking that a malignant Fate had been told off specially to look after him and his house. It was something like the case of Job done into Irish —a worthy man experimented on by a malignant Power, just to see how far it could go with him. It pleased him to think that his case was parallel with that of Job, and to feel that the Powers were greatly interested in the Mahonys. And in spite of his pessimism he was not without hope that the future of the Irish family might resemble in point of prosperity also that of the Chaldean.

Kathleen left him, after going round the table and putting a hand on his shoulder to show him that, as far as she was concerned, she did not consider that anything had occurred to bring about a condition of strained relations between them.

But she made up her mind that, after what her

father had said, it would not be wise for her to go to the river on Saturday. She knew that she had changed her mind several times in regard to this issue. But now her mind was made up. Her resolution was final.

She would not go to the river on Saturday.

CHAPTER XIV

SO she went to the river on Saturday.
But she was an hour late.

She somehow felt that being an hour late was equivalent to a highly successful compromise between her resolution and her inclination. There was a strain of Hamlet in her philosophical outlook during these days. She had adhered to her resolution for the whole of one day and the greater part of the next, and Saturday morning came and found her still resolute. It was not until she had risen from lunch that she recollected that she had not had her customary walk for two days.

She had of late avoided the sheltered path through the glen, where she had once been accustomed to take exercise: she knew that she could not always rely on a strong man being present to kick Captain Kenney down the bank; and to-day, especially, she knew that she could depend on the strong man whom she had in her mind being somewhere else. But then there was the alternative of

a stroll along the cliff path. She had always been fond of this particular walk; but, alas! to-day there were suggestions of a sea-mist coming in with the tide to the long and narrow lough, and in such circumstances the cliff path was difficult, if not absolutely dangerous.

What was left to her but to go to the river?

She saw with great clearness that Fate was against her in the matter of keeping her resolution; and besides——

"Psha! I am not a fool," she whispered to herself. "Goodness knows I am practical enough. I can look at things straight in the face; and besides——"

She did not glance at her watch. She was quite well aware of the fact that she was an hour late for the river. One o'clock was the hour which the man had suggested, but already it was two. This would show him that she did not consider herself bound to him as she would be to some one in her own station in life in the matter of an appointment. She would do well to be even further behind time; it would show him that——

But already she had the stride of one who is late for an appointment and hurrying to make up for one's unpunctuality. Before she got to the bottom of Brian's Boreen—the short cut to the river—she was discussing in her mind which of the excuses

that she had impressed into her service she would employ when she should meet him.

She only slackened her pace when she caught sight of him afar. He was seated rather uncomfortably, but certainly not ungracefully, among the twisted snake-like roots of one of the trees that had grown too close to the river-bank and had been undermined by the current. He was smoking a cigar quite contentedly. Her hurrying walk suddenly became the most casual of strolls. She paused once to admire the view where the trees on the opposite side of the river parted, showing the Falls of Rathneagh at the end of a vista. It seemed as if she had never had a chance before of giving to the lovely picture the attention that it deserved, and she saw him flick the long ash off his cigar by a touch of his little finger. Heavens! he did it with the air of a man accustomed to smoke cigars.

She had all her life been a close observer of little things like that—those little things that are so illuminating to an intelligent observer; and now as she stood there (admiring the view) the thought that flashed upon her was—

"*He is a gentleman!*"

What was in her mind was "Gentlemen *versus* Players." He was a Gentleman and not a Player.

How strange it was that she had never thought

of this before. She had, of course, felt all along that he was a man of good manners as well as considerable strength, and a certain adroitness in dealing effectively with an obnoxious opponent; but never until this moment, when she had seen him give that little flick of his finger, did it occur to her that he was one of those men of whom she had occasionally heard—they are more numerous in the colonies than at home—men well born and well educated, and perhaps good sportsmen, who, when the "crash" came, having never been prepared for a profession, were not ashamed to turn their hands to something that they understood thoroughly—horse-breeding or gamekeeping, or estate work. One Gentleman (in the "*versus* Player" sense) of whom she had heard had become a most successful market-gardener; another was giving lessons in golf; a third lessons in billiards; a fourth taught fencing; and a fifth had gone upon the stage and become a very bad actor. Needless to say these were not Irishmen, who would rather live by borrowing money from their dearest and poorest friends than by work at home; though once let them get abroad and they are ready to work with the best of all the working races.

Yes, beyond a doubt that man Henry was one

of this type of Englishman—a worker and not ashamed of it—a gamekeeper with the manner and the bearing of an educated man accustomed to move in good society.

In a moment she remembered how she had been puzzled by his choice of the caviare sandwiches—and the olives; he had eaten olives with a relish. No Englishman, unless he has been educated up—or down—to olives would eat them with a relish.

And the next moment the recollection of his having carried her in his arms across the river came back to her.

She stopped abruptly as a file of soldiers stop at the command "Halt!"

She was in the act of turning to make a rush back by the way she had come, when he turned his head; he was before her by a few seconds, so of course it was no use for her to try a retreat. All that she could do was to walk on quite unconcernedly and make a casual remark about the picturesque charm of the vista, with the Falls framed by the long line of irregular foliage that failed to follow the sinuous course of the river into the distance.

He had got up on his feet and thrown away the half-smoked cigar, just as a "gentleman" would do

—sometimes—before she got within speaking distance. But he touched his cap, just as a well-trained "professional" would have done.

Her casual reference to the view that had attracted her attention took the form of an abject apology for her want of punctuality.

"I am so sorry—I must have kept you waiting for quite a long time," she said. "But the fact is that I—I——"

She had no excuse handy. Part of the pose which she had resolved to adopt was to make no apology for her lateness; but somehow in his presence she had forgotten all the incidents of her pose; so she was actually forced to tell him the truth.

"The fact is that I was not sure that I should be here at all."

"I hope that you were nothing the worse for—for all that you went through on Wednesday, miss," said he, beginning to put the rod together.

The "miss" sounded queerer to-day than it had seemed on the Wednesday, she thought. She remembered, however, that it had struck her on Wednesday that he had begun the day with great punctilio of "miss," but that in the course of the afternoon his mode of address had fluctuated.

After the first hour he had always addressed her as Miss Mahony.

"You needn't be at the trouble to prepare the rod," she said. "I am not going to fish to-day."

He paused at his job, and looked at her in some surprise and a good deal more disappointment. The result of his scrutiny was apparently to tell him that she was in earnest, for he withdrew the last joint from its socket and returned it to its canvas case.

"Very good, miss," he said. "But Major Ainlie will be greatly disappointed if you don't fish. I took care that he heard all about the twenty-pounder—it was within three ounces of twenty pounds."

"I cannot help his disappointment," she said. "It was very good of him, and all that, to write as he did to my father, about the fishing, but I did not come to fish in our river—I mean *his* river—because of that letter. You must remember that I came because—well, you gave me the invitation, and I felt that I owed you something for the good turn that you did me. Funny, isn't it? I suppose you would call it a bit of Irish, my showing you that I wanted to do something for you by having the best day's fishing of my life."

She laughed, but with a certain measure of uneasiness.

He did not laugh.

There was a long pause before he said, still disjointing the fishing-rod—

"I remember how you put it, Miss Mahony,"—he had begun early to-day to add her surname—"and I know that I felt paid off with a good balance in my favour before the afternoon was over. I suppose I was an ass to suppose that you would come a second time, since you had paid me off in full—and more—the first. But I hope you don't think that it was a bit cheeky—that I was taking too great a liberty for a man in my position—to say what I did about coming back to-day, Miss Ma—— miss."

"I didn't think that at all," she replied. "If Major Ainlie gave you *carte blanche* in the way of inviting people to fish in our—in *his*—river, nothing is left for me to think about the matter except that it was very good of you to invite me. I'm only sorry that I can't—I hope you don't think it nasty of me to say I would come to fish, and then to turn up late and refuse."

"I could never think anything like that," said he. "I know nothing of your reason for excusing yourself, but—I have heard a good deal about your father, and I saw with my own eyes that it was not his intention to accept anything that looked like a

favour from Major Ainlie. I dare say that you told him——"

"I told him nothing—nothing of our Wednesday's fishing," said she. "I suppose I should have done so, but—in that case I certainly would not be here to-day. You see, I intended coming here to fish again, and I knew for certain that he would forbid me, and perhaps write a disagreeable letter to Major Ainlie."

He said nothing immediately after this. He had now fully disjointed the rod and packed it away. He seemed to think that there was nothing more to be said on the matter.

"That's all right," said he; "you came, you are here, and that's something."

"I didn't want to seem to be rude, and besides—I had to take a walk somewhere, and I thought that a mist was coming up from the sea, so that I could not go along the cliffs."

"Quite so, miss—I see."

She somehow felt that he was telling her she might go home now. He stood there waiting apparently for her to say "good-bye," or perhaps to nod to him and then walk away.

And that is just what she said and what she did. She nodded to him and said—

"Good-bye. I hope Major Ainlie will catch the

next twenty-pounder there is going. I'm pretty sure that there's another big fellow making for the Falls. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, miss," said he, putting his finger up to his cap.

She walked on and he stood watching her curiously.

Was he greatly surprised when, after going on for about a dozen yards, she turned and walked back to him? Her face was roseate, and her eyes were downcast.

"I am afraid that you think I haven't treated you quite well," said she.

"Nothing could have been further from my thoughts," he replied. "I fancy that I know what your father is like, Miss Mahony. And besides, you have something on your mind."

"How is it possible that you saw that?" she cried, and her face had scarcely time to cool before it was flaring once more. Did he guess what was on her mind—the Hamlet controversy which had been going on in her mind during the past two days?

How could she tell him the truth?

She easily avoided doing so, being a true woman.

"I have had something on my mind, indeed," said she. "It came just when I reached home on Wednesday, after our day's fishing—a cablegram

from my brother. But I suppose you do not even know that I had a brother?"

"The Constabulary officer mentioned it."

"To Major Ainlie?"

"Yes. I was in the room."

"He was talking about us—our family, I suppose?"

"At no length—only casually."

"But he gave Major Ainlie a chapter or two from our family history, I am sure."

"Oh dear, no; he merely mentioned that there was a boy and a girl—you were the girl—miss."

He could not avoid a little smile when he had added the "miss." She caught sight of it.

"You are smiling because you think it was rather adroit on your part to address me as a servant would," she said.

"I trust that I know my place—miss," said he, and again he smiled, but it was the merest cat's-paw of a smile this time.

"Do you know your place, for I don't," she said. "Do you wish to remind me that your place is in the servants' hall? Do you fancy that if I thought you were a servant—an ordinary born servant, I would talk to you as I have done—as I am doing?"

"If you knew how I feel your condescension, Miss Mahony."

"There is no condescension. I honour any man—any woman—who is not ashamed to work for a living when the day comes when they are compelled—probably through no fault of their own—to do so. I respect you for turning your hand to honest work instead of loafing about with your hands in your pockets—or in somebody else's pockets. That was how my poor brother came to grief, as no doubt the Constabulary officer told Major Ainlie—laying stress upon the somebody else's pockets. You heard the story?"

"I heard no story, and I can answer for Major Ainlie. The officer—Singer is his name—only said that your brother had had too much to do with horses—with racing—the usual thing."

"I suppose it is the usual thing that brings men under the notice of the police. Did he not mention that he held a warrant for the arrest of my brother for a crime of which he was accused before he went to South Africa?"

"He certainly said nothing of the sort, nor did he so much as hint at it."

"That was very remiss of him—very kind, perhaps I should say; he might have made quite an interesting story out of it. It is a fact that my brother was accused of something three years ago; he was innocent, and he ran away to avoid being

arrested, but, of course, he will be arrested the moment he shows his face in this neighbourhood."

"But why should he show his face here again if he is to be arrested?"

"Why, indeed? And yet a cablegram arrived from him on Wednesday telling us that he was on his way home. And we had been thinking that he was doing extremely well in South Africa! Is it any wonder that in these circumstances I should have something unusual on my mind?"

"None, indeed. It is very good of you to come here at all to-day. It is more than good of you to tell me what I need scarcely say I will regard as confidential. You have paid me the compliment of trusting me."

"But you don't quite know why I should do so? Is that what is on your mind?"

"Well, I admit that——"

"That you are surprised? You may well be; but you are not so surprised at my making you a confidant as I am myself. I had not the remotest idea when I came here just now that I should make you acquainted with this horrid bit of our family history, and I don't think that our conversation led naturally up to it, did it? Perhaps it occurred to me that I should set you right if it ever crossed your mind I was inclined to be—you said the word just

now—condescending—coming here to fish with you—talking to you as if—as if—I forget what I was trying to say; but you know what I mean, and you know also how little right I should have to think myself in a—what do you call it?—a superior station in life. I am not sure that you will not see me in the prisoner's dock some of these days. If my brother returns and appeals to me to hide him, you may be sure that I'll do so, and that would be criminal too, wouldn't it?"

The man kept his eyes fixed upon her face all the time that she was speaking. He saw the brave attempts that she made to keep down the tears that, welling up, gave an exquisitely liquid tone to those eyes of her—as softly dark as the darkest of violet pansies. He thought he could appreciate, in spite of—nay, on account of—the muddle she made when she tried to explain it, what was on her mind when she spoke of her desire to assure him that the spirit of camaraderie in which she had met him was not the result of any condescension on her part. He had a feeling that her attempt to make him aware of the fact was rather an effort to reassure herself in respect of her relations with him. Another point of which he was pretty certain was that the idea of his not belonging to the servants' hall had only occurred to her recently. When she had been fishing

with him she had not thought of such a possibility.

He wondered what act of his had aroused her suspicion. Had he not been most careful to call her "miss"? He made up his mind that he would never call her "miss" again.

"Of course, you believe your brother to be innocent?" he said, after an interval.

"I am certain that he is innocent," she replied firmly. She waited to see if he would give that little smile which would suggest an ironic thought passing through his mind—the smile of the counsel for the prosecution who is amused—and wishes to hint as much to the jury—at the prisoner's assertion of his blamelessness. If she had seen the least hint of such an expression on his face, she would have turned round and walked away.

But she failed to see it, and so she remained.

"And I, too, am convinced of his innocence," was all that he said.

"But you said you had heard nothing whatever of my brother and his accusation."

"Nor have I; but I have come across a good many Irishmen in my time, and I have noticed that they are much more given to blame themselves than to excuse themselves when accused of indiscretions. I wonder who advised him to run

away. Never mind, innocent men frequently run away; it sometimes seems to them to be easier to run away than to face a serious charge."

"I always said he should not have run away; but he did so on the advice of that man Kenney."

"Good Lord!"

"It was in a transaction with Captain Kenney that the thing was done—or supposed to be done; and then the bank took up the case, and Captain Kenney said he was powerless to prevent my brother's arrest. The warrant had been applied for and granted, and so he helped Desmond to escape. Whatever Captain Kenney may be, I must say that he did his best to get my brother out of the country. If it had not been for this I don't think I should ever have allowed him to enter our house."

"Ah! May I ask you what was the exact charge stated in the warrant?"

"That I could not tell. I never saw the warrant."

"But surely your father or his solicitor would look closely into this matter?"

"I don't think that there was a consultation or a scrutiny or an examination of documents. Desmond ran away, and that was the end of it—at least we were hoping so until that cablegram came from him on Wednesday."

"My word! You will pardon my saying it, I

hope, Miss Mahony, but this is the most Irish transaction I ever heard of. A warrant is issued for the arrest of a young man belonging to a good family, and, although he is innocent, he allows himself to be persuaded by an unscrupulous cad to run away, and no member of his family is sufficiently interested in the matter to inquire into the particulars of the charge against him! Did the Constabulary officer not volunteer any information on the subject to your father or yourself? You must frequently have met him during the past three years."

"He never so much as hinted at knowing anything about the matter. We thought it very considerate—in very good taste—to refrain. You must remember that in most parts of Ireland the people are much more tactful and considerate than the majority in England."

"Tactful—considerate! I hope that you will not think that I am wanting in these two most prominent Irish characteristics, if I hunt up this affair and find out what the charge against your brother actually was, and what chance he would have of fighting it by the aid of first-class counsel."

"I don't think that my father would thank you——"

"I don't want him or any one else to thank me."

"I'm afraid that he would think that you—that—you have had some experience of my father."

"He would think me, no doubt, an impudent busybody to go prying into the cupboards of your family in search of skeletons. Well, I can't help that. You have awakened my curiosity—and all the rest is public property. I shall at least find out whether the charge against your brother was one of burglary or forgery or bigamy."

She stiffened visibly.

"You cannot do so without Major Ainlie's permission—without his assistance, and I know that if it came to my father's ears that Major Ainlie was interesting himself in our affairs, he would be greatly displeased."

"I admit that I cannot do anything without Major Ainlie's permission," said he. "But——I wonder if you share your father's unhappy prejudices in regard to him, Miss Mahony."

"I have heard little about him except from you," she replied. "And, now that I come to think of it, I have heard very little from you. Of course, there was the lunch on Wednesday—a splendid lunch! But that was, I expect, your work."

"I give you my word, Miss Mahony, everything in the basket had come through his hands—he ordered all."

"And I acknowledge that it was quite nice of him to give me permission to fish in our—in *his* river; but in spite of all this—no, I think it better for you to—to——"

"To mind my own business? Well, perhaps you are right. But all the same, I mean to satisfy myself on some points in regard to the charge against your brother."

"Please do nothing of the sort. You may do a great deal of mischief. Captain Kenney is a malicious man. If he should hear that you are making inquiries, he may do something against my brother out of spite to you."

"Captain Kenney! Do you fancy that I should ever allow him to make a single point against me? My dear Miss Mahony, I flatter myself—Kenney—by heavens! I believe the right thing has come to me in a flash!"

"The right thing?"

"The right thing; the warrant should have been for the arrest of Kenney!"

CHAPTER XV

KATHLEEN was startled. The confident way in which the man spoke well-nigh carried conviction with his words. He saw this, but so far from following up his assertion by giving her his reason for speaking so definitely, he seemed to draw back in some measure. It seemed as if he was afraid of awaking in her a hope that might not be realized.

"Perhaps I had no right to tell you just what came into my mind at that moment, Miss Mahony," he said. "But whether right or wrong, that is what is in my mind. Why on earth it should be left for me—a stranger—an outsider to make such a suggestion, I cannot understand."

She shook her head.

"I wish I could think that you hit upon the truth," she said. "But it is too good to be true. I must go now. Whether you are right or wrong on this point, you have succeeded in giving me more hope than I had half an hour ago—hope that my poor brother may still have a chance."

"I am glad of that," said he, "though I should be sorry to be the means of raising your hopes on a shaky foundation. But you must see how I look at things. Here is your brother—a type of his race—good-natured, extravagant, careless of money—with no thought for the future bevond the next Punchestown."

He made a pause; he was anxious to show her how unlikely it was that such a man as he had described should be guilty of a serious offence—an offence demanding the issue of a warrant for his arrest; but he found to his surprise that he had depicted the very man who would be led, out of pure want of thought, to do something which might be found by a court of law to be highly culpable. It was just the sort of man described by him who eventually finds himself confronting a police magistrate, while his counsel allows that he has been very foolish, but submits that he stole the money or forged the cheque or obtained the goods under false pretences with no criminal intention.

If the man who was endeavouring to convince Miss Mahony that it was impossible that her brother could be a criminal had remembered the advice given to the newly appointed Justice of the Peace by a shrewd person—never to give any reason for a decision, he would have made a better impression

on her. He felt, when he had finished his description of the ideal innocent brother, that he would have done wiser had he gone no further than to affirm his belief in her brother's innocence.

"That is your brother," he said. "Foolish, undoubtedly, but—oh, put him alongside that fellow Kenney and ask yourself which of the two is more probably the guilty man. Add to that what you have told me about Kenney's advising him to leave the country, and what conclusion can you come to?"

"I do not wish Major Ainlie to meddle in our affairs," she said, and he knew that the sequence in her words was to the thing which was uppermost in her mind, not to anything that he had been saying.

He paused before replying to her. Then he said—

"I can give you my word that nothing that has passed between us on this subject will go beyond myself."

"I am satisfied," said she. "Of course, having told you so much, I cannot now forbid your doing anything you may see fit to do with a view to satisfying yourself as to my brother's innocence—or—the opposite."

"No; you cannot," he assented. "But I hope

you may trust to me not to make any move to which you could take exception."

"I feel sure of it," said she; and in the impulse of the moment she stretched out her hand to him.

He took it eagerly, but parted with it respectfully.

"Thank you. You do me great honour," he said in a low voice.

"I do nothing of the sort," she cried. "Goodness knows why I have told you anything of this unhappy business. I assure you that when I came here I had not the remotest idea of talking to you about our family affairs. Good-bye."

She had become abrupt, almost brusque, after he had dropped her hand. It seemed as if she were trying to neutralize the effects of her sudden impulse. She was once more in the act of walking away when he spoke.

"Will you give me an opportunity of telling you what I have done—if I make up my mind that anything should be done in this matter?" he asked.

"I do not want you to do anything."

"But if I should see that in the interests of—of —justice——"

"Oh, I do not wish to make any further appointments," she said. "I might be worse than merely unpunctual in keeping them; but I am very fond of this walk by the river, and I feel that I should

take a walk every day for the sake of the exercise —usually after lunch. But, of course, you will understand that I do not bind myself—that I am not making an appointment in any sense of the word. Good-bye."

"Good-bye—miss," he said.

She turned round and laughed.

He laughed also.

What was the exact point of humour that so affected them it would be difficult to say; but for certain they both seemed to appreciate it, and that was enough for them.

Miss Mahony, however, did not feel greatly inclined to be hilarious while she was walking up from the river to her home. Her reflections did not at all tend in the direction of laughter, and her feelings—though as a rule they had nothing in common with, but a good deal in opposition to, her reflections—had almost a tragic tendency.

She was more of a mystery to herself this day than she had yet been. She even found that there was something mysterious in her choosing the riverside for her walk; she had forgotten that that sea-mist which she so dreaded had threatened to make the cliff path dangerous for a pedestrian. But even had a recollection of the mist cleared away this mystery, there still remained the marvel

of her having begun to tell the man the whole story of her brother. She was unable to say that she had been led to so curious a topic to discuss with a stranger—a comparative stranger and a servant—a kind of servant—by any artifice on his part. She remembered that she had actually said "good-bye" to him a moment before; she had actually taken some steps away from him when that impulse to return and tell him that domestic secret, which she should not have divulged even to her most intimate friend, had dominated her.

To be sure he had said to her a few moments before that he knew she had something on her mind; but she knew that such a remark, even though it suggested some sympathetic acumen—that was how she thought of what he had said—could not be regarded as a legitimate opening for the conversation that followed. Well, whatever might have been the origin of the impulse on which she had acted, the fact remained the same: she had told him her secret, and he had discussed it with her, not merely as if he were an equal, but from the standpoint of a man of the world infinitely her superior in experience and judgment and intelligence.

And he had done it all in so masterful a way, and yet with a politeness which is rarely on visiting terms with masterful men! He had firmly but

courteously ignored the wish she had expressed for him to refrain from meddling in what was a sacred family affair—unpleasant family secrets are sacred in proportion to their unsavouriness—and she had been forced to content herself with that half-hearted compromise—his promise that Major Ainlie, his employer, should not be placed in possession of any of the facts regarding the son of the man whose home he had taken over.

Living as she was in Ireland, she had had experience of the men who had taken over the highly mortgaged estates of some of the most ancient families in the island—taken over not only the old furniture and the pictures of numerous ancestors, but the family crest as well, and the hereditary banshee. But she had no idea of allowing Major Ainlie to take up the family skeleton of the Mahonys (she was ready to exaggerate the paltry delinquency of her brother Desmond into a regular family skeleton), though in throwing open the door of the cupboard in front of the eyes of Major Ainlie's servant, she could hardly feel that she had acted discreetly.

The more she thought over the whole business the more mysterious it appeared to her, and the most marvellous part of the whole chain of mystery was that she should now be feeling—she had passed

from all consideration of her reflections and had come to the question of her feelings—that in spite of her lack of discrimination, and in spite of her stupidity, she had enjoyed the hour she had spent with that man almost as highly as she had the Wednesday's excitement of fishing in his company.

Before she had reached her home she found herself debating in her own mind what was the earliest possible day when she could take another walk by the river on the fighting chance of meeting him again.

It was when she found herself at this point that she stood still. She found that she had cast aside all question of what was due to her father in the way of obedience, of what was due to her family, and, above all, of what was due to her own sense of self-respect, and had become absorbed in the question as to whether she should allow two days or three to pass before meeting him again in the locality she had suggested, with what seemed to her at the time infinite delicacy, but what she now blushed to feel was absolute coarseness.

This was the point at which she pulled herself up.

When the strange truth came to her, giving her a glimpse of her own heart for one moment, she stood still upon the road, and remained staring out to those broad spaces of sky and sea that lay

before her and beneath her, for she had climbed up from the valley of the river bed, and the Atlantic was roaring in the distance. For several minutes she remained rigid, facing the incomprehensible, as she was facing the sea.

At last she walked slowly on, but before she had gone more than a hundred yards she stopped once more.

"A fool! Oh, there was never such a fool as I have been! Have been?—as I am—as I am! I shall go away—anywhere—anywhere—until this madness passes. Madness—it is madness! Anywhere—anywhere!"

She walked rapidly in the strength of this resolution on to her home, and on the table, waiting for her, she found a letter which had just arrived from Mrs. Wallands, inviting her for a month to Dorsetshire. The Wallands had a place on the Dorset coast, and Mrs. Wallands thought that Kathleen Mahony, who lived on the brink of the Atlantic Ocean, would be all the better for a breath of sea air.

CHAPTER XVI

SO, after all, the salmon would not reach the Wallands at Grosvenor Place.

This was, curiously enough, the thought that flashed across Miss Mahony when she read the terms of the cordial invitation that awaited her. A few minutes previously she had formed the resolution to go away immediately—to make an opportunity for going if none presented itself—but now she showed no inclination to regard the letter which she had just received in the light of a heaven-sent response to her ardent prayer for the means of putting her resolution into practice. All that came into her mind at that moment was the thought that the beautiful salmon would be spoilt, unless some member of the Wallands family had remained in London.

What a pity!

But the letter had to be answered. The Wallands' Dorsetshire home was a delightful place, and quite a number of interesting people were

certain to be of the party. She would undoubtedly enjoy herself for a month.

But, of course, her father would have to be consulted on the subject of accepting the invitation. To be sure she clearly saw that it would be somewhat selfish of her to go away and leave her father alone with his morbid railings against that Fate which had decreed that a man cannot both eat his cake and have his cake; and she perceived that she would not be doing her duty as a daughter were she to implore of him to let her go to the Wallands. All that she could legitimately do would be to place the invitation in his hands and abide loyally by his decision.

And this is just what she did, without feeling in the smallest degree that she was a bit of a hypocrite. She handed him the letter while she was pouring out his tea, saying—

"Mrs. Walland has written asking me to go to them for a month from next week. How kind she is!"

He glanced at the letter.

"Of course you will write and tell her that it is out of the question," said he, folding it and returning it to her.

"I suppose it is out of the question," she remarked. "But they are very kind to think of

me when they have so large a circle. I have always had a good time with them."

He glanced up at her from the piece of toast that he had just buttered.

"Good heavens!" he cried, "you do not mean to suggest that you would like to go now—now—when Desmond is at the point of returning!"

"I suppose it would really be impossible," she remarked, with a sigh that suggested resignation—of a sort.

"How would you like to be sitting at the table when Colonel Walland reads out of the morning paper the news that Desmond Mahony, who some years back bolted to escape arrest on a criminal charge, had been captured and lodged in gaol on his return to Ireland?" he asked sternly.

She shook her head.

"I do not think of going to the Wallands," she said. "But—I wonder if it is not Captain Kenney who should be arrested instead of poor Desmond," she added after a little pause.

Her father laid down the cup of tea which he was in the act of raising to his lips. He stared at her.

"How on earth do you come to ask such a foolish question?" he cried.

"I have been—thinking over the whole horrid

business—I took a long walk this afternoon so that I might think it all out."

"If you arrived at no saner conclusion than that, you would have done much better to have remained at home," he said. "That is the worst of you girls; if you have any prejudice against any man you are never satisfied unless you associate him with every crime that has been committed for years past."

"It was Captain Kenney who advised Desmond to run away," said she.

"And he got off in safety. The criminal is the one who advised him to return," said he. "If you have made up your mind to insult Kenney at any opportunity you would do well to accept the Wallands' invitation. You must know that Kenney has us in his power."

"How has he got us in his power?" she cried with a note of indignation in her voice, mingling with one of incredulity.

"Have you forgotten that it was in a transaction with Kenney that the boy made a fool of himself?"

"I only know that Kenney said so. I have never been able to find out exactly what the transaction was. Do you yourself know, father?"

"What a question to put to me! I knew but too well at the time. All my life I have never been

able to master the details of business; but Kenney explained the whole thing to me at the time, and I saw how, in the eyes of the law, Desmond had laid himself open to arrest."

"I think we should have employed a good lawyer; he might have been able to show that the real culprit was not Desmond. Even now it might be possible——"

"Are you mad? We could not consult a lawyer now without the knowledge of Kenney, and who can tell if he has been turned from being our friend to be our enemy? You have never lost an opportunity of being nasty to him, Kathleen."

"I would rather have him our open enemy than our false friend, and I am convinced that he never was anything else than a false friend to us—to Desmond in particular. I feel that he should stand in the dock instead of my brother."

"You feel? Truly a woman's explanation. That is the worst of women, cold facts are nothing to them—they feel."

"Yes, that is the worst of us—God help us! We feel—we feel. Our feelings are more to us than all considerations in life—than discretion, than prudence, than reason! That, I find, is what it is to be a woman—I am beginning to find it—this bitter truth is being revealed to me with bitter-

ness; and the worst of it is that I would not have it different for all the world."

She had risen from the table and had walked across the room to one of the windows. She spoke with her back turned to the room, so that whatever expression was worn by her face was concealed. But her fingers were interlaced behind her, and if her father had been anything of an observer he could not have failed to be alarmed at the emotion which was suggested by the convulsive movement of her hands, and to demand from her an explanation of how it came that just now she should be so affected by the reiteration of the constitutional traits of womanhood.

He was not a close observer, however, and all that he concluded from the tone of her voice was that she was greatly annoyed at being placed in the wrong by his masterly reasoning. He thought, too, that she must be greatly chagrined at not being able to pay her visit to the Wallands. He regarded himself as rather more than ordinarily shrewd upon occasions, and that is just the sort of man whose ancestral home is occupied by strangers.

"You are showing some temper, and I do not like that, my dear Kathleen," he said quietly. "I dare say you are a bit annoyed that some obstacles are in the way of your going to your friends

in England. Well, I don't blame you. I fancy that I know what is on your mind."

Now she turned round upon him in a flash.

"Do you really fancy that?" she cried. "Do you really believe that you can tell what is on my mind? You think that I had set my heart on going to the Wallands?"

"It was but natural. But I know you are sensible enough to perceive that we are the victims of a power that we cannot control, and so——"

"That is it—you have put the matter in a nutshell," she cried. "A power that we cannot control—that is what is keeping me here. Half an hour ago I had made up my mind that I must go away—that my only hope was to be found in going away at once—at once! But now you have said the words—a power that we cannot control—I give in. What is the good of trying to stand out against such a power? I abandon every attempt to do so. I will stay, but God knows that I had made up my mind to go away in time—before it was too late."

He gazed at her in amazement.

"What is the meaning of all this fuss about nothing?" he said. "I am ashamed of you, Kathleen. I always thought you were level-headed—for a girl—until you were such a fool as to reject

Lord Clanreagh. But this tirade—you should be ashamed of yourself."

"I know that—I know it; but I am not ashamed of myself. I would not for worlds that it were otherwise. I am a fool, and I am not ashamed of it! I glory in it!"

She burst out in such a laugh as startled him, for at first he thought that she was in tears. He did not recover for several seconds, and then she had gone to the door and was leaving the room.

"What on earth is the matter with you, Kathleen?" he said in gasps. "I wish you would not laugh again like that. I actually thought at first you were—that you were—were—why, so you are. I never knew anything like that—one minute laughing and the next in tears—if you are really in tears. Are you really and truly in tears?"

"Oh, no, no; not really and truly," said she after another pause. "Not really and truly, only——"

She made an enigmatical motion with both hands and then laughed outright quite pleasantly while she was going out of the room, and even after she had reached the stairs.

But when she had got into her own room and had flung herself face down on her bed she was not laughing.

CHAPTER XVII

KATHLEEN allowed two days to go by without thinking of taking her afternoon walk by the river; and, after all, it was not by the river she next met him. She had gone some distance up the mountain. It was not Major Ainlie's mountain, but another, which had not been abandoned to the grouse or to the heather that fills their crops and endows them with sovereignty over all the tribes of the air. The slope which she was treading was only a mountain by courtesy. It was not precipitous, nor was it broken up by romantic glens or watercourses. It was a commercial declivity, for on some hundred acres or so of its surface there was a working soil nearly four inches deep in places, and all this was cultivated after a fashion by men who called themselves farmers, and were content if they kept a day ahead of famine by the aid of the most degenerate of the great family of the tuber. But sometimes the famine took the lead by a day, and then these agriculturists and their

families had to be kept alive by contributions from beyond the boundary of their barren mountain.

It had come to the knowledge of the Mahonys that, in the race with famine on the mountainside, the agriculturists—they were about as much agriculturists as their mountain was a mountain—were a lap or two behind, and Kathleen had carried a basket laden with food to one of the cabins. In the old days, while the dwellers on the slope had been scraping a living off the four inches of impoverished soil, the Mahonys had, as a matter of course, to make up for any deficiencies due to Nature and laziness—in many districts it is as natural for the people to be lazy as it is for Nature to be industrious. Scarcely a week passed without contributions being applied for to the castle, and it would be ridiculous to assume that, because the family had had their estates sold and had been turned out of their home, they should cease to be the protectors of the poor. When the Mahonys were dispossessed of their property the peasantry had been grief-stricken, and for weeks the hills had sounded with wailing; but then there came a sharp snap of the bared teeth of the famine-wolf that was for ever dogging their steps, and without delay the Mahonys were appealed to for help

as usual. Equally as a matter of course the help was not withheld, and the people were grateful—as grateful as usual. But they had asked all along why should they be forced to starve simply because the Mahonys had become poor; and there was no one found so ready with a reply to this question as the French statesman had been to the people who demanded of him to say if they must not all live, and he shrugged with, "*Je ne vois pas la nécessité.*" Least of all did it occur to the Mahonys that now was the time for them to make an attempt to get rid of a burden which, in accordance with the inexorable laws of Nature, and the equally irrevocable decrees of practical political economists, they should never have taken upon their shoulders. No, the mountain had come to Miss Mahony and Miss Mahony had gone to the mountain from her new home; and, as one of the tribe remarked to her, though the new home was a deal smaller than the old, the basket that she carried had suffered no proportionate curtailment. This was quite a satisfactory reflection for the mountain, and once more the famine was beaten by a neck.

It was to the cabin of one Peter O'Leary that Kathleen had gone with a heavy "creel" of eatables—the mountain could look after itself tolerably well, as the Excise authorities more than suspected,

in the way of the one drinkable of the country—when she found that she had been forestalled by Major Ainlie, for the representative of the "interloper" was seated on a shaky stool just beyond the shaky door of the cabin with one of the numerous O'Leary offspring on his knee.

On the sudden entering of "the good owld stock—God pity them!" Mrs. O'Leary, with a belated presence of mind, endeavoured to conceal the basket—a still more capacious one than Kathleen was carrying—which had plainly just arrived from Major Ainlie, and which still stood on the earthen floor. She did not wish Miss Mahony to know that baskets were in the habit of arriving from the man who now occupied the ancestral home of the Family. She and her husband, in common with the rest of the population of the mountain, had never lost an opportunity of railing against the "interlopers" in the presence of Miss Mahony, giving her to understand that, however they might try to cajole the honest mountaineers, the latter would never accept a favour from the villains that had crossed the channel in an ambitious but a vain attempt to set up as one of the quality in Ireland. And all the time, with a forethought that suggested a study of the Highlands of Scotland at the time of the Pretenders, they were busily engaged in

establishing an *entente* with the new-comers, which they hinted could be best consolidated by a gift of eatables.

Remembering all this, and not wishing to hurt the feelings of the young lady by allowing her to see the castle basket, Mrs. O'Leary hastily pushed one of her children in front of it, holding the young thing there with a firm hand, and endeavouring at the same time to signal with her foot to her husband to remove the evidence of their disloyalty, while offering a voluble welcome to Miss Mahony. As a semaphore, however, Mrs. O'Leary's foot was lacking in subtlety. It was broadly effective, but it failed to express any finer shades of thought, and its by-play quite confused the man, though he could feel the force of every separate toe upon the calf of his leg.

"What's the woman after at all?" he murmured.

Whereupon she gave him another and, as she hoped, a more amply expressive series of thrusts with the whole bunch of her toes.

"Glory above us! What's the matter, mother?" he asked in a confidential whisper; but his obtuseness so annoyed his wife that she made an unwise attempt to move the basket itself with her foot, for, catching the edge of the wicker-work, it slipped

off upon the body of the child, sending it sprawling over the young lady's boots.

It so happened, however, that this *contretemps*, serious though it seemed, was the saving of the situation, for while the castle emissary was picking up the howling offspring, and the young lady was bending over it, the tactful mother flung her apron over the too conspicuous basket and laboured with it to the side of the turf creel, which she promptly put over it, extinguisher fashion; and before she had executed the manœuvre, the excitement over the accident was calming down.

And all the time the good woman's voice was sounding without ceasing. It was a sight that was good for them all to see, Miss Mahony's sweet face looking in at the door, and many was the time that that same sweet face—all the saints in heaven bless it!—had brought the sunshine under the thatch, and the warmth of a summer's day through the middle of the winter's cold; and didn't the children, the craythurs, look for her coming as the lark looks for the dawn, and goes half-way up to the heaven to find it? and how was his honour these fine days—God save him and keep him from harm—and did his honour have good sport in the boats when the mackerel was in the lough? Oh, didn't she mind the time when his honour was caught between the

wind and the current off the Phoca rocks when streaming for the mackerel in the good owld days!

So she went on while manœuvring to get the basket removed out of sight, and her voice made a sort of background as it were to the squalls of the afflicted child, the sympathetic expression of its four brethren, all of the same apparent age, and the bewildered exclamation of "himself," meaning the husband.

It was not until she had returned, after effecting the concealment of the basket, that Mrs. O'Leary seemed to become aware of anything having happened to disturb the innocent serenity of her household.

"And what's the matter wid the child at all?" she asked, and before her thirst for information on this subject had a chance of being satisfied, she was assuring the child that nothing in the world was the matter with it, and was hustling it and the other three—one was difficultly detached from the trousers of the castle emissary to which it was clinging—to the further corner of the cabin, leaving her to give all her attention to Miss Mahony and her basket. The children had just discovered the curiosity of the concealment of the other, and were perspiring in their efforts to remove the creel that had extinguished it.

At the entrance of Miss Mahony the other stranger had got to his feet, murmuring a good morning. She had been courteous to the same extent—no further; and when the noise of the little *contretemps* had subsided into the sounds of Mrs. O'Leary's voice, he took his leave, being as respectful as usual in regard to the young lady.

"It's misself that's not sorry he's gone," said Mrs. O'Leary when he had disappeared. "Not that he isn't a decent enough craythur for all that he does come from the place that that crule interloper has tuk from the owld stock that should have been left to end their days under the roof that sheltered their fathers and their fathers' fathers back into the good owld days."

"Has he been here before?" asked Kathleen.

"Oh, a mere matter of once, or maybe twice; I can't be sure," replied the woman. "Sure the children do be tuk finely to him. But if it isn't your wish and the wish of his honour, he'll never darken that door again."

"Why should we have any wish of that sort?" said the girl. "He seems to be a very good man, and I suppose he suits Major Ainlie; and as for the interloping, haven't I told you long ago what I feel about that? Isn't it far better for you all to have a man at the castle who has money to spend,

than a set of paupers like us who were letting the place go to ruin for want of the money to keep it in proper order ? "

"I won't hear you say a thing like that, Miss Kathleen," said the woman. "Isn't it misself and himself standing silent over there like the omadhaun that he is, that knows there's no quality like the owld quality ? Och, what's the country comin' to at all when the likes of the one that's lording it in the castle at this minute is the son of a man that once on a time sowld penknives for pence in the street—so they tell me."

"I wouldn't be too gloomy over this matter if I were you, Molly," said the daughter of the castle. "I don't think that any of the people on the mountain will be the worse off for Major Ainlie's money. Hasn't he sent his head keeper to look after you all more than once ? "

"And what signifies that, tell me, Miss Kathleen?" cried the woman. "What signifies the twist of tay and the ounce of baccy that he brings now and again. What signifies the——"

But the good woman was spared the enumeration of the details of insignificance, for at last the united efforts of the four children, who had been suspiciously silent around the extinguished hamper, were crowned with success. They had tilted over the turf creel,

and with it the hamper that lay beneath, and in a second the varied contents tumbled out and were revealed to all eyes.

There were a dozen cakes of bread fresh from the griddle, and as many rissoles of meat, a large piece of ham and a good pound of tea. The bag of sugar had burst, but this accident did not promise any great inconvenience to the household. Sugar was being industriously retrieved by the children, even before their mother, breaking off in her account of the paltry incidents of Major Ainlie's generosity, had made a rush at them, sending them with one dexterous stroke into the four corners of the cottage.

When the yells that accompanied this distribution had in a measure subsided, Mrs. O'Leary, too cute to resume in the same strain her criticism of the donations that came from the interloper at the castle, hastened to disclaim all intention of grumbling.

"What was I saying, miss, when them children broke me off? Oh, ay; I was discussin' about how grateful we had need to be to the Major," she said with infinite complacency.

"And it seems to me that you have every reason to be grateful to him," said Kathleen. "There's a good pound of tea in that paper, if there's an

ounce, and those meat cakes should do you all for a week. I suppose this is the second time this week that the keeper has brought you such a load."

"It's not for the likes of us to complain, miss," said Mrs. O'Leary, guardedly feeling her way; she was not quite sure if Miss Mahony was not disposed to look with favour upon a still further expression of goodwill in regard to the Major and his emissary. But she did not want to go too far. She was feeling her way. "Oh, indeed, yes, miss; the keeper is as nice a man—for an Englishman—as ever drew near our doors, and the children tuk to him from the first, and I says, says I, to himself over there—she indicated her husband, the silent man —'if his honour is as daysent a man as his keeper, I shouldn't wonder if he become a jewl in the eyes of the people here about'—not that the best of them would go far to take the place of the raal owld family, miss, but sure I needn't say that to your face; 'tis you that knows what's the thruth. And must you be going, Miss Kathleen? And me that busy gabbling all about nothing, that 'tis never a word of thanks I've bestowed upon you for your basket. But sure you don't need thanks, or we'd all be down on our bended knees before you— 'tis only God bless you and yours, I'll be after

saying to you now. Can't you say a word to thank the young lady, you dumb omadhaun ? "

Before Mr. O'Leary, to whom the last question was put, had recovered from the daze which his wife's volubility never failed to induce, Miss Mahony had said her good-byes and gone out upon the inhospitable face of the mountain. For some time after she could hear the exclamation of heartfelt gratitude for her gifts with which Mrs. O'Leary took good care the cabin should resound, while there was a chance of their being audible. But Mrs. O'Leary had not in her plans made any allowance for such an accident as Miss Kathleen's shoelace needing to be retied, and the time that this operation occupied the girl was just the space that Mrs. O'Leary had allowed for her passing out of range of hearing. In consequence of this little error of judgment, Miss Kathleen heard the terms of the mother's rebuke of her children for having meddled with Major Ainlie's hamper, and of her husband's lethargic indifference, whereby he had not only failed to interpret her signals to remove the hamper, but to guard it when encircled by the turf creel.

She also was forced to hear something of the dispute between the husband and wife on the somewhat delicate question as to whether she herself

would feel in such a way as to be prejudicial to the interests of the O'Leary family, their reception of a series of benefactions from the interloper.

She walked on quickly, having an unerring instinct that by so doing she would escape an estimate of the comparative value of her own basket and that of the interloper.

CHAPTER XVIII

HE was waiting for her, seated at the side of one of the mountain paths, a cigar in his teeth.

She could not bring herself to believe that she had not expected to find him waiting for her; though a week ago she might have succeeded in doing so, now she could not so much as make an attempt in that direction. A week ago she would have been humiliated if she had been in the least degree conscious of the feeling which now dominated her when she saw him waiting for her.

And yet he did not seem to expect that she would shake hands with him. He even apologized for the liberty he had taken in waiting for her to leave the cottage.

"I would not have ventured to do so if I had not some news for you," he said.

"Some news? About my brother?" she said interrogatively.

"I was anxious to relieve your suspense," he replied, "and I feared that you might not find your way down to the river for some time. I thought

it a bit of good luck to meet you at the O'Learys' homestead."

"So it was, but I'm not so sure that the O'Learys were of the same opinion. I was glad I met you there, however, because it gave me a better opinion of Major Ainlie than I had before. I am afraid that I was greatly prejudiced against him. I had a feeling that he would be nothing more than a commonplace type of the wealthy Englishman, with a proper English scorn of our poverty and a disregard of the wants of the peasantry on this mountain."

"You were pretty far mistaken," said he. "I can answer for him, I know, and assure you that he has a full sense of his responsibility so far as the people are concerned. But I think that had he known that you were bringing the O'Learys a basket to-day, I would not have had the carrying of a pretty heavy hamper to the same place."

"Why not? The O'Learys will find plenty of use for both."

"I don't doubt it, but——"

She knew that what was in his mind was that such a benefaction on the part of Major Ainlie might bear to be regarded as an attempt to rival the offerings that came from the disinherited family: she had been brought to think so well of Major

Ainlie as to give him credit for such delicacy of feeling.

"What were you about to say?" she asked.

"It doesn't matter," said he. "I did not wait here to try to induce you to think more favourably of Major Ainlie than you have, naturally, been doing. I only wished to tell you that I have been making inquiries—cautiously, I need scarcely say, and the result is, as I expected it would be, that I learned that no warrant is in existence for the arrest of your brother, and no warrant was ever issued."

"Is it possible? Are you quite sure?" she cried. "Did you make your inquiries in the right direction? But, of course, you would not have been so stupid as to go in the wrong direction to find out the truth. But are you certain that no one suspected that you were interested in proving that my brother was innocent?" She stopped suddenly and flushed slightly. "I know that I am not wrong in assuming that you are interested in his innocence," she added in a low tone.

"You are certainly not going too far in taking so much for granted," said he in the same tone. "I think that I should like to do something for you, Miss Mahony—something to make you believe that —that—I appreciate the way you treated me from the very first. I treasure the letter you sent to me

when you fancied I should be hurt at the way your father spoke to me. There are not many girls in your position who would have taken the trouble to do so much for a man like me."

"Oh, that was nothing—nothing—the very least that any one could do in the circumstances. I think that I had an instinct from the first that you were not just Major Ainlie's head man—I had a feeling that you were—that you had been at one time—in some other position in life. I dare say it was a sort of fellow-feeling. We too had been turned out of our castle, you must remember. But that doesn't matter."

"It mattered a great deal to me. I wonder if you ever read the verses that a man wrote in Australia—a man who had been cut off for years from his old associates—longing for an English lady to shake him by the hand once more?"

She nodded.

"I think the poem beautiful," she said. "But you—you were never quite—quite——"

"No; I won't pretend that I ever had just that feeling upon me," said he. "What I often have had, however, is a longing to find some one who would—would—shake hands with me, taking me for what I am—forgetting all about my position in the world. That is what all men want. I give

you my word that men who are born wealthy—men of rank, have often that longing to be accepted for what they are in themselves—that longing to find some woman who will put her hand in theirs, simply as a woman to a man, for his manhood only. If you only knew how chaps with a title, it may be, or with the pot of money which nowadays is what every one aims at—how these chaps begin to have doubts about every woman they meet—mothers with daughters to throw at their heads—not that the daughters need much throwing—you would understand how a good many decent fellows fall into a cynical way of looking at things. Oh, Lord, you will shout for help—how I have been preaching! It was your fault, Miss Mahony; you shouldn't have encouraged me—you shouldn't, indeed."

"I'm glad that I did so," she said slowly and gravely.

Then there was a long pause between them as they walked down the slope together. He had his eyes on the ground, and seemed to be set on thinking out some point that had occurred to him.

All of a sudden he stopped.

"Miss Mahony!" he cried, and she was startled by the vehemence—the impetuosity with which he spoke. She stopped and looked at him.

He glanced at her, and then his eyes fell once more. He shook his head for a second, and it was as if he had said—

"I'll not risk it."

He hurried on as if he had forgotten that she was beside him. She remained standing where she was when he had startled her by his exclamation.

A great fear, which is sometimes part of a great delight, had taken hold of her. The first thought that came to her was—

"He will not risk it."

The second—it came when she saw how he shook his head—was—

"Will he not risk it?"

And she stood there waiting for whatever might come. Her fear had left her. In that moment, under the stress of all that she felt between two of the quick beats of her heart, she had been given a glimpse into that heart, and had come to know all that was in its depths, just as some one standing at the head of a long valley, hidden in the darkness and tumult of a thunderstorm, sees every detail of the landscape suddenly revealed under a flash of lightning.

But she was conscious of a sense of great relief when she found that he would not risk it.

"I beg your pardon," he said, when he had

returned to her—he had taken quite a dozen steps away from her—"I beg your pardon. I was nearly —forgetting——"

"Forgetting?"

She felt that it was her duty to help him out of his difficulty of forgetfulness—he had forgotten what it was that he had forgotten.

"What you have forgotten is to tell me from whom you heard all that you did hear respecting my brother," she said; and they resumed their walk side by side.

He was quite eager in adopting her suggestion.

"Yes, yes; how stupid of me!" he cried. "That was the only excuse that I had for waiting for you. But, of course, I told you the substance of what I had found out."

"That the warrant had never been applied for—that is so far as your informant could say? The only suggestion that remains is how far did his information go?"

"That is so beyond a doubt," he cheerfully assented. "Well, I must tell you that I thought it better not to apply to Singer, the Constabulary officer, direct. I asked Maguire—Mr. Maguire, Major Ainlie's agent, to make all the inquiries for me. I had done him a good turn at one time, and I knew that I could depend on him. But even with

him I was artful; I did not want him to know too much. He came round to my quarters the night before last and I drew him on to talk about your family. I affected to have forgotten every detail that had come to my knowledge respecting you and your brother. I suggested that he had told me that your brother was a little shady in reputation, but he pulled me up at once. 'I never said anything of the sort,' he declared with some warmth. 'I only said that Desmond Mahony had been a bit of a fool, and that he had flung money about as if he had a diamond mine at his back or a soap factory.' 'I could have sworn that you told me that he had done something shady, and that a warrant was issued,' said I. 'My good fellow,' said he, 'if you take my advice you'll keep a civil tongue in your head, or you'll find yourself in trouble. Neither Mr. Mahony nor his son ever did anything to lay me under a debt of gratitude to the family; but I'm not going to stand by and hear any one say that they were ever guilty of that sort of thing.' I shook my head doubtfully, and that seemed to suggest something to him. 'By the Lord Harry,' he cried, 'you have been listening to that fellow Kenney. I know that a couple of years ago he was in the habit of giving vague hints about young Mahony and what

he knew; but I thought that he had thrown up that game.' That is exactly what he said."

"But, after all, that was not conclusive," said Kathleen.

"You don't fancy that I came to a stop at that point," he cried. "Oh dear, no; I said, 'Look here, I remember now who it was told me that young Mahony had come a bad cropper and was forced to run away to avoid arrest, and I would take it as a great favour if you would provide me with official evidence showing it to be a lie. I must have something to go on, however, not merely hearsay.' Of course, he asked me what evidence would satisfy me, and I said that if he would tell me he had taken the trouble to put inquiries to the District Inspector of Constabulary and the Clerk of the Petty Sessions, and if they had both satisfied him that no warrant had ever been applied for against young Mahony, I would also be satisfied. 'You might be,' said he, 'for it would be impossible for any warrant, or even a summons, to be applied for without the knowledge of these two men.'

"Well, last evening Mr. Maguire came across me and assured me that he had seen both the civil officer and the constabulary and they had ridiculed the idea, and, moreover, as he had suggested to me, they had asked him if he had been listening to

Kenney's tales. Now I think that should be enough for you, Miss Mahony. From the first I had a suspicion of what way the truth lay. Didn't I say that it was Kenney and not your brother who should be arrested ? "

"You said so, indeed," cried Kathleen, after a long pause. She had tried to speak before, but tears came instead of words, and she had to wait until they had ceased to flow, and she had in some measure command of herself again. "You spoke the truth, and you have lifted a terrible weight from my mind. I wondered how it was that I had been led to tell you the story of my brother, but now I know that it was a happy inspiration of the moment that came to me. I had a feeling that you would know how to help me in my trouble. How can I ever thank you ? "

She had stopped—for the third time—and offered him her hand.

"You have more than repaid me," he said. "Haven't you given me your hand twice before ? What would I not do to have the chance of holding it again ? "

She was not now in the mood to allow him to make protestations to her on the basis of the experience of the man in the Australian poem, who had so longed to feel the touch of a lady's fingers

in his hand. That attitude had become preposterous in her estimation during the previous ten minutes. She had never ceased to feel that she was by the side of a man who was infinitely her superior in every way—in intelligence, in culture, and, above all, in worldly wisdom, even though now and again he had shown himself to be reluctant to run certain risks, and mindful—was it possible to be too mindful?—to maintain a respectful attitude in regard to her.

She did not respond in any way to his hints about the happiness which she had given him by treating him as an equal. She was not his equal, and she knew that she never could be.

But she would not talk of all this to him.

"It was just as you said it was bound to be," she cried. "You said that you had never known anything so thoroughly Irish as our accepting without inquiry all that that man said—that man."

"Did I say that it was thoroughly Irish?" he inquired anxiously.

"You certainly did say so."

"Oh, well, if I said so I suppose I'll have to stand by it. And now that I come to think of it all, it was thoroughly Irish, wasn't it?"

He had succeeded in making her smile. But

still there was a suspicion of tears in her voice as she said—

"It was very Irish for us to allow ourselves to be taken in by an Irishman."

"But I cannot understand how it was that, when you were meeting almost every day with people who could have told you all that Mr. Maguire told me, you did not put a question to one of them," said he. "Surely when you found that no one whom you might suppose to be acquainted with the facts made the smallest allusion to the warrant or to the act that called for the warrant, you must have been led to suspect that Kenney had deceived you."

She shook her head.

"You do not know us yet," she said. "We took it for granted that it was their tact—their consideration for our feelings—that caused them never to make the smallest allusion to something that we could not but have felt very deeply. Even if my brother had behaved disgracefully, and had been found guilty by a judge and jury, we should never hear an allusion made to the circumstance by any of the people whom we met."

"Such delicacy of feeling is something to admire," said he. "But it has its drawbacks. I wonder if it ever reached your ears that the very evening we

entered your old home we were attacked by a band of men wearing masks and carrying weapons, and that they threatened to murder us ? "

"You are jesting—rather cruelly, I think you will allow, considering that I am an Irish girl."

"You heard nothing of that incident ? I assure you that it took place all the same."

"I can't believe it possible. Were you in the castle ? "

"I was in the castle, but it was Major Ainlie and his friend, Captain St. Maur, who were in the dining-room when the gang entered under the leadership of one Sullivan."

"I heard that Sullivan had gone hurriedly to see his daughter in the States."

"I believe that Major Ainlie made his departure to be rather hasty. It was, it appears, devotion to the old family that brought about the raid, and I suppose it was the same devotion that prevented any one from referring to it in your hearing."

"I remember now that my father told me he had met Sullivan, and that he had given some dark hints to the effect that my father had but to lift up his little finger, and the interlopers—that's what the people called Major Ainlie and his household——"

"I am sure that we are still called by that name.

I shouldn't wonder if Mrs. O'Leary called us so the moment my back was turned. Anyhow, it's a good name for us—we are interlopers, you know."

"We took it for granted that if the thought of such a design ever existed outside Sullivan's head it had been abandoned. My father—you do not mean to say that Major Ainlie believed that my father——"

The thought that flashed upon her caused her to grasp his sleeve while she looked eagerly to him for an answer to the question that she could not finish.

He took the liberty of laying his hand gently on hers as it lay upon his arm, while he said—

"You would do Major Ainlie a great injustice if you thought him capable of fancying anything of the sort in respect of your father. No, I believe he summed up the whole affair at its proper value. He beat Sullivan within an inch of his life with his own blackthorn, and he gave the rest of the party a drink and sent them home as jolly as sandboys, leaving their weapons behind them, not necessarily for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith, as the newspapers say. You should see the weapons. If one of them had gone off somebody should certainly have been killed, but it would have been the one who pulled the trigger."

"What must you—what must Major Ainlie think of us?"

"You may be sure that he looked at the whole incident in its proper light. I have said so before. I hope that you will do the same. If you do not, you will make me sorry that I mentioned the matter at all. Up to the present I have been as considerate of the feelings of the people as if I were Irish myself; I have never alluded to it even in the most distant way to any of our neighbours. I trust that in time I may be as tactful as the best of them. And now about the river. Now that you have nothing on your mind, don't you think that you should have a try for another twenty-pounder?"

"You remember what I said to you the first time you gave me such an invitation?"

"I have not forgotten it. You said if it would gratify me you would come. Are you going to give me the same conditional promise now?"

He thought she was about to assent with a single word, but she did not. She said—

"I will not say now what I said then; I will come this time to gratify myself—I am not thinking of you at all. Yes, I will come, because there is nothing that I should like so well—nothing in the world."

"I will be at the river every day," said he.

So they parted. They had gone down the slope together, and had come to where the tracks divided —the one leading to the coast road, not a quarter of a mile from her new home, and the other getting lost in a boreen within a mile of the castle.

But they had not been parted for longer than a minute before each of them turned round. They did so at exactly the same instant, and each saw what the other had done.

She had a moment's indecision, then she raised her hand.

He put his finger to his cap.

She hurried on, and would not glance round again even for a second, but she knew that he was still standing there watching her.

And he knew why she had hurried on without looking back.

Was there anything more left for him to tell her ?

CHAPTER XIX

SHE had scarcely passed the threshold of the house before she found herself confronted by her father.

"Oh, my dear father, I have news for you indeed," she cried.

"Some one else was the bearer of news to me just now," said he sternly. "News that I could not believe—the worst that was ever brought to me, if it is true. Kathleen, it is not possible that you have been fishing in the river?"

For a moment she felt as she remembered she had felt as a child when she had got into some desperate piece of mischief and had been found out. She hung her head, but only for a moment, and only in the force of her recollection of her childhood. She became aware of her possession of a feeling that there was something above obedience to her father to which she owed allegiance. She felt that she had suddenly become a woman, and that her womanhood alone had a right to dominate her.

The maiden stream hitherto moving between the boundary of its banks had suddenly reached the sea.

"Why should it not have been possible for me to fish in the river?" she asked.

"How can you put such a question to me?" he cried angrily. "Heavens above! that a daughter of mine should so much as entertain such a thought! Fishing in that river which was wrenched away from us by that upstart!"

"Major Ainlie bought the river in the ordinary way of business when you and your father had squandered away the property which was yours; but he gave me leave to enjoy a day's fishing, and I frankly admit that I never enjoyed any day more. I caught a twenty-pounder after playing it for three-quarters of an hour. You never saw such a splendid fish."

"Miserable girl! I want to hear nothing more of your splendid fish," he almost shouted. "Miserable girl! have you no pride?"

"Very little," she replied. "What have I to be proud of, father; tell me that?"

"Heavens above us! Look at me. Because I happen to be poor, have I therefore lost any of my pride?"

"I'm afraid you have not," she replied very gently.

Somehow she had come to see what a paltry

figure her father cut—how paltry was his pride—how full of pretence was his life. Why, he could not even protect his son; he had assumed that his son had been guilty of a crime, and his ridiculous pride had prevented him from taking steps to prove his son's innocence. And not only so, but he had been stupid enough also to take the word of a man whose rascality should have been obvious to a peasant, in regard to his son, and had thus allowed himself and his daughter to be miserable for more than three years, believing that his son was a fugitive from justice.

And the man whom he had insulted—the mere servant of another man whom he never wearied of insulting—had perceived the truth within the space of a few minutes.

She looked at her father and pitied him.

"You are afraid——" he repeated.

"I say that I am afraid you have lost none of your pride," she said. "Oh, my dear father, what have we to be proud of? We have reason to be proud of our ancestors, you may reply. Well, I'm not so sure of that. But I think that before we show any pride we should do well to ask ourselves if our ancestors would be proud of us. They left us an immense property. Where is it now? They left us the care of a whole countryside of

peasants, and how have we cared for them? Only in the way of turning them all into beggars—cunning beggars—I have had proof of their double dealing this very day. We taught them nothing better than all the arts of beggary, and we were quite pleased; it gratified our sense of importance to be begged from by them—to send them a load of provisions when they were at the point of starvation!"

He stood before her in amazement. He had meant to overwhelm her by the revelation of his discovery of her conduct, and this was how she took his charges. It was he who was being overwhelmed.

"What has come over you—what madness—madness?" he said.

"I have only been thinking over everything in connection with Desmond, and I think I have come to learn the truth," she said. "Poor Desmond was badly treated——"

"No more of this!" he shouted. "You fancy that I will be led to discuss these revolutionary doctrines of yours, and so forget your infamous disobedience? What demon possessed you that you should accept that man's invitation to fish in that river? Were you not present when I flung his invitation in his face?"

"I was," she replied. "It was because I wanted to make amends to the man who carried the letter that I accepted the invitation."

"To make amends? You wished to make amends to that insolent keeper, who turned his back on me when I was giving him his message?"

"Yes; I wished to do something to compensate him for your want of consideration," she said. "And, besides, that man had done me a very good turn, and I wished to show my gratitude to him."

"The girl is mad—quite mad," he muttered. "She went to fish with him to show her gratitude! She insulted her own father to show her gratitude to a servant! If that isn't going as far as folly can go I know nothing of the meaning of words. Who is this precious keeper? Do you as much as know the fellow's name?"

"His name is Henry," she replied.

"Has he no surname?"

"I understood that that was his surname. It gratified him to see me fish in the river, and I have told you that I owed him gratitude at that time, but since then that debt has increased beyond measure."

"What on earth do you mean? How could you—you—my daughter—a Mahony—you—gratitude—a common keeper—my daughter——"

"I will tell you, and then you will have a chance of feeling grateful yourself and of showing your gratitude."

"I wish to hear nothing of the fellow any more than of his employer. Heavens above! what do you take me for that you fancy I wish to hear anything more about that gang—to discuss with you the acts of a common gamekeeper—gratitude to a gamekeeper! The fellow looked for a tip—he tried to extort half a sovereign from you, fancying that your father was a fool of an Irishman—I know the way those fellows speak of us. Did he get any money out of you—answer me that?"

She did answer him, but she did not open her lips.

She merely lay back on the chair in which she sat and roared with laughter.

The idea of her offering a tip to the man seemed to her the very height of all that was comical.

Her father, however, seemed not to have been let into the secret of the comedy which had so marked an effect upon her imagination. He took a step toward her as she lay back in the chair—a menacing step; but she was insensible to every menace at that moment; and, perceiving this, he gave an exclamation of impatience and went out of the room, banging the door behind him. Mr.

Mahony was a very good type of the father who bangs doors. He seldom does any more harm than at worst a carpenter or a glazier can make good in half an hour.

"My poor father!" said Kathleen when she had recovered from her paroxysm, brought on by the thought of offering a certain man half a crown for having saved her from the impertinence of Kenney, and perhaps five shillings for the information he had, by his tact and intelligence and knowledge of men, been able to give her on the subject of her brother, and the accusation which had made her and her family wretched for years. "My poor father! When you hear all—all!"

The thought of all that was included in that "all" had a rather sobering effect upon her. She sat up in her chair, and her thoughts tended to tragedy rather than comedy.

If her father had only remained in the room for a few minutes longer, and if he had not made that absurd suggestion, with half a sovereign as its basis, he would have given her a chance of telling him at least some of the reasons she had for feeling grateful to the man. But now she feared, from the mode of her father's exit, that he would have to remain in suspense for another day in regard to

Desmond. That would be her father's punishment for all that he had said about Major Ainlie and his entourage: she would not remove from his shoulders that burden which, until an hour before, she had shared with him.

She never doubted for a moment that it was from Kenney her father had received his information as to her day's fishing. Kenney must have been spying on her that day—perhaps he had been spying on her every day since. Her thought was: "Oh, that he—*he*—had caught Kenney in the act of spying!"

It was an unkind longing to have. However contemptible a wretch Kenney had shown himself to be, it would be impossible to believe that he had done so much as to deserve such consequences as would result from his being found spying on them by the man who had been her companion.

The next hour or two she spent in a reverie—a very woman's reverie, for she not only had a placid sense of the good news which it was in her power to communicate to her brother on his arrival, but she also drifted far away from this point to such details as the best way to be revenged upon Captain Kenney, and the form which her gratitude to the man who had placed her mind at ease should assume. Her reverie led to no definite results. She had put aside

her father's suggestion as to the disbursement of half a sovereign in this connection—that at least was definite, whatever else it might have seemed to her to be, looked at from her own standpoint.

But if Kathleen's reverie was long, that of her father was brief. If hers was vague, his was concise. He had always been accustomed to boast that it did not take him long to make up his mind on any point, and he had good grounds for such a boast. To be sure it usually turned out that the conclusion at which he arrived so expeditiously was wrong, but that was a detail which had nothing to do with the question of the rapidity of the working of his mind.

This evening he was more than usually rapid in determining what course he should pursue in regard to his recalcitrant daughter. He sat down and wrote a letter to Major Ainlie—a letter insolent in its politeness and its presentation of Mr. Mahony's compliments to Major Ainlie, "who, Mr. Mahony understands, is at the present residing at Rathdearg Castle." This was, he thought, very good for a start, hinting as it did in no dark way at the utter insignificance of Major Ainlie in the estimation of Mr. Mahony. And then it went on to give Major Ainlie some instruction as to the habits and customs of polite society with which the writer assumed Major Ainlie

to be but imperfectly acquainted. Among civilized people it was, he begged leave to tell Major Ainlie, the case that when one gentleman received an invitation from another, and treated it as a document requiring no reply, the sender understood that the recipient was not desirous of availing himself of the other's courtesy, and was bound to regard a repetition of such an act an intrusion. Mr. Mahony was sure that Major Ainlie only required to be informed of this to give instructions to his keeper named Henry to abstain in future from persisting in a course which he had adopted in regard to a defenceless member of Mr. Mahony's family, and which Mr. Mahony felt bound under the circumstances to resent as a gross piece of impertinence.

This letter he wrote with great gusto, and dispatched to its destination with great glee. He felt extremely well pleased with himself. He felt as if he had knocked off Major Ainlie's hat in the street and then kicked it into the gutter, and all with none of the disagreeable consequences which might possibly follow close upon the commission of such an act. He was so pleased with himself that he refrained from saying anything further to his daughter on the subject of her reprehensible conduct in accepting Major Ainlie's invitation to fish, out of her feeling of gratitude to Major Ainlie's keeper named

Henry. His remarkable reticence was of course quite enough to set his daughter asking herself what it meant; and equally, as a matter of course, she came to the conclusion that he had written an insolent letter to Major Ainlie.

And what would be the result of his doing so, she asked herself. Would Major Ainlie give orders to his keeper named Henry to refrain from pressing his courtesy upon the daughter of a man who had written so ill-conditioned a letter? or would he simply fling the letter into the waste-paper basket and say nothing about it to any one?

She rather thought that he would adopt the latter course. He had shown before that he was inclined to be indulgent in respect of Mr. Mahony, and to appreciate their relative positions, his own as that of the interloper, and her father's as that of the dispossessed.

But if Major Ainlie should think fit to adopt the former course of the two that had suggested themselves to her, what would she do?

That was not an easy question for her to answer. If Major Ainlie were to issue orders to his man to have nothing to do with any member of the Mahony household, did it therefore follow that the man would obey those orders? Her father had practically forbidden her to have anything to say

to the Ainlie entourage, but was she disposed to obey those commands? She could not believe that the man would show a livelier sense of what was due to his employers than she did in regard to what she owed to her father.

She had rather an uneasy night, in spite of the fact that she had learned that her brother might return to his home at any time without running a chance of being arrested.

She was not kept for long in suspense as to the course which seemed to Major Ainlie the right one to adopt. Her father was reading a letter from Major Ainlie when she came down to breakfast, and his face was a study.

He turned to her with the letter in his hand.

"The fellow has lied to you," he cried. "His name is not Henry. He has lied to you!"

She took the letter from him and read it.

"Major Ainlie is quite sure that Mr. Mahony has been correctly informed in regard at least to one of the customs of civilized society; he feels, however, that it is to be regretted that Mr. Mahony's informant did not go a little further in his attempts to make up for Mr. Mahony's apparent want of experience of the class to which he refers.

"Major Ainlie would have very much pleasure in

forbidding any of his servants to have anything to do with Mr. Mahony's family; but he begs leave to inform Mr. Mahony that he has not in his employment any man named Henry, either as a Christian name or a surname."

"You see, the fellow has lied to you," said Mr. Mahony, taking the letter which his daughter offered to him.

"Whoever may have lied, he is a true man," said she firmly. "I will not discuss him with you. Where did this mackerel come from? I did not hear that the mackerel had arrived. It is early for them, isn't it?"

Her father stared at her for some moments. Then he helped her to some fish.

CHAPTER XX

IT was just about this time that Major Ainlie and his friend St. Maur were eating their desultory breakfast at the castle. They wandered about the room sampling a good many articles of diet which were spread over the side table. Cold curry, of a peculiar brand, Indian buffalo hump, the eternal cold grouse, and a few other details were on the side table, while on the silver plates above the spirit lamps were a few hot comestibles—kidneys *à la maître d'hôtel*, eggs *à la princesse*, *omelette aux fines herbes*, and a mackerel *au naturel*. Neither of the men seemed at all embarrassed by the numerical strength of the dishes. They had splendid appetites and digestions that shrunk from nothing. They amused themselves among the dainties, taking nothing seriously. Dinner is the only meal that men, if they are wise, take seriously. Breakfast should be regarded as a sort of curtain raiser.

"I see that the Government are bringing in a new Army Bill," remarked St. Maur, laying down the

newspaper and taking a stroll—for the fifth time—to the side table. He rather thought that a prawn with a leaf of lettuce was the right thing to follow buffalo hump. At any rate, that particular sequence had never been tried before. "I wonder what the new man's theory is about the army. Pity they don't hand the whole thing over to Lyons or Harrod or the Stores, and tell them to run it for them on proper business lines."

"I'm not quite sure that I did right to follow your advice in the matter of that letter," said Ainlie. The new army scheme clearly made no direct appeal to him.

"I knew that you would try to run away from it. I think, after all, that I should have taken that prawn earlier," said St. Maur. "What's troubling you about the letter? It was the only possible counter to the old boy's chit."

"That's true enough, I dare say; but I've been thinking that I shouldn't have treated his letter as if it needed an answer; it was rather weak—taking his lead over," said Ainlie. "Besides, it's a family affair. I don't want to hurt the feelings of the family."

"That's very kind of you," said St. Maur; "but it strikes me that you should have thought of that a bit earlier in the day."

"How much earlier in the day?"

"Well, before you became your own Henry."

"Oh, that? H'm—yes, there's always a day of reckoning for the reckless. But what was I to do? If I had not become my own Henry I should have——"

"You would have had a better time among the birds—that's all. By the Lord High Admiral, you have done the birds a gross piece of injustice! Three days you have had in their company, all the rest of the time you have spent in the company of——"

"Hang the birds!"

"And the fish?"

"And the—'m; on second thoughts I'll not say a word against the fish."

"You had much better not. The fish have stood to you, from all that I can hear."

"What have you heard, and whom did you hear it from?"

"I have heard nothing from nobody; but I have had both my eyes open, though sometimes I wink with the other. You've been a sphinx yourself all through the business."

"Did you expect me to report progress to you every evening? Lord, I'm not the Duke out of *Twelfth Night*. You remember the idiot who

gathered all his household about him daily to tell them how badly he was in love—getting them to sing songs to him and that?"

"You might try it on here. I heard one of the boys yelling out a very funny lyric a couple of nights ago, cleaning the guns—something about 'Ballybanagher and the sky over it.' If you take my advice, old chap, you'll chuck the Henry business as soon as you can. The longer you keep it up the worse it will seem, you know."

Ainlie shook his head.

"That's the devil," he remarked. "Would you be startled to hear that that's just what has occurred to me more than once within the past day or two?"

"These things are always the devil," said St. Maur in a paroxysm of sympathy. "How far have you got up to the present?"

Ignoring this rather leading question, Ainlie selected a bunch of grapes from the centre dish, and when he was making up his mind from what quarter to attack it, muttered—

"The very devil! I wish I saw my way out of it."

"When a chap has been going crooked for any length of time, and he wants to get out of it, the best thing for him to do is to go straight at once," said St. Maur.

"There's something in that," assented Ainlie. "The fact is, I'm dead tired of old Henry, and I am ready to fire him out at any time."

"Tell him to take a month and be hanged to him," said St. Maur.

"I don't say, mind you, that he hasn't been a good servant to me, but I've got sick of him. I wish I could see my way to get on without him."

"That's what a chap always feels when his man has been cheeky, and he would like to hoof him out into the street. But when once he has been hoofed out, it's wonderful how easily he is done without."

The philosophy of his friend was taken quite in good part by Ainlie. It agreed with his own experience of servants in many parts of the world. But with his Henry it was quite another matter. His Henry had become so much a part of himself that, however tired he might be of him and his ways, he could not bring himself to dismiss a character that had been so useful to him during the previous two weeks.

"I don't quite see my way to fire out Henry," he muttered from the window at which he was filling his pipe.

"Then the sooner you do the better it will be for both of you," said St. Maur. "And the longer you delay the more trouble you will have with him.

I've noticed that often in the matter of lies. It's not safe to allow them to accumulate."

St. Maur then went to find his pipe in the hall, where he had left it before going to bed the night before; and, when he found himself alone, Ainlie stood for a long time with the matchbox in his hand, but with the lid unraised.

"It must come sooner or later," he growled. "The only question is when the revelation should come." He continued trying to work out this question to a legitimate conclusion; but it did not appear as if he had been particularly successful in his endeavours; for after several minutes of earnest deliberation, he gave an exclamation, struck a match so vehemently that it broke in his fingers, treated a second in the same way, and a third.

At last he got his pipe alight, and when he had taken a whiff or two he withdrew it from his mouth and examined the bowl quite critically.

"I'll trust to luck," he said. "What's the good of making out a programme? Nothing that is set down in this way ever comes off. I'll trust to luck to give me a dig in the ribs when the right time comes. And even then the right moment may mean the wrong one."

. . . . . .

Some hours later he was sitting on the edge of a grassy place on the highest part of the river bank just beyond the Stone of Dunesk. In front of him lay the lunch basket—it had contained an entirely new series of sandwiches, salads, and ices—the handy silver coffee apparatus was beginning to show signs of steaming, and the fine salmon that represented the morning's sport were laid out tidily on the sand and pebbles of the shallow little bay beyond the rapids.

Kathleen was seated a few yards away, a coffee-cup in her hand. Her face was grave. She had caught nothing beyond a six-pounder to-day. If she had managed to get another twenty-pound fish, she might have been so carried away as to be unable to say to him all that she had said.

CHAPTER XXI

AND the man's face too was gloomy, and his voice was not cheerful. It would have been plain to any one who had seen him at that moment that he had just been the recipient of some disagreeable news.

"Of course, you know your own business—your own especial case," he said. "But I cannot for the life of me see why you should say that this must be our last pleasant day together—why, this is only the second time you have fished in this river."

"I have fished in it hundreds of times," she said.

"I mean, of course, since——"

"Since the river slipped out of our hands?"

"It has not slipped out of your hands. Didn't Major Ainlie make it plain to your father how he thought of this same river in respect of your family?"

"Oh, he did his best; but—well, some correspondence has taken place since then, and so——"

"And so?"

"Well, do you think that a girl should, for the sake of her own pleasure, do something that she knows to be contrary to her father's wishes?"

"That's a question which you should put to some expert in ethics, and I hope that I may never degenerate into that. I am afraid that you have been discussing the matter too earnestly with yourself during the past few days. I regret that you should have come to the conclusion that you were doing what you were not justified in doing according to all the laws of sport."

"If there was a Decalogue of sport I might claim to be let off; but unfortunately one is judged on quite a different code. I said at first I would come, only to show you that—that I was not quite so inflexible as my father, and that——"

"You ran to me after you had refused Major Ainlie's invitation, and asked me straight if your coming would give me pleasure, and when I told you that it would give me more pleasure than anything in the world, you promised to come."

"And I kept my promise. You see, you had done me a very great service—one that I do not think a girl ever forgets."

"And you accepted out of a mistaken feeling of gratitude?"

"Something that way. Need we talk of this any more? I don't want to talk of it any more. I have been thinking too much of it."

"Of it? What do you mean by 'it'?"

"I mean—everything—gratitude to you—my father's anger—everything."

He looked at her for some time—quite a long time. Then he said—

"I think the time has come for me to tell you something that I should perhaps have told you before. Are you prepared for a revelation?"

She gave a little start; he was going to risk it.

"A revelation?" she said.

"Yes; I fancy it came into your mind yesterday, or the day before—perhaps the evening of the last day we were here together, that I was the most impudent gamekeeper you had ever met."

"I certainly thought that you were the most unusual one."

"You were entitled to think of me as the most impudent. I know I came to that conclusion before I reached the castle that day. The only excuse I could make for myself was that you encouraged me."

"You wish to throw the blame on me?"

"Exactly. I wish to suggest that the gracious way in which you trusted me from first to last would

be calculated to turn the head of any man in—in the position of a gentleman. Do you know what it means to a man in that position to be treated as an equal—as a comrade, by such a girl as you ? "

"Oh, in Ireland it has always been an unwritten law that sport levels all ranks."

"I know that in England—in every country in the world—it is an unwritten law that—that all ranks are levelled by—something else, Miss Mahony."

She turned her head when he had spoken and looked at him gravely—almost sadly.

"If you will allow me, I will go now," she said slowly.

"I will not let you go until you hear all that I have to say," he cried, and now he got up on his feet and stood before her. She had also got to her feet. "I cannot allow the one chance that I may have of telling you that however foolish it may be—however mad you may think it—I tell you that you are the one girl of whom I have been dreaming all my life—that the moment you came before my eyes I recognized you—the one for whom I had been longing all my life. Now you may go away; but I know you—I know that you will bear in mind that I have told you this; and I know that while

you may think me something of a fool you will never think of me with contempt."

She did not go away when he had spoken. She remained looking into his face, and sadness was on her own. Her eyes were full of tears. There was a long pause before she said—

"What am I to say to you?"

"I did not ask you to say anything to me—I do not ask you to speak a word," he cried.

"Then you will allow me to go without trying to——"

"No; I will ask you one question. You may reply to it if you think fit; but if you do not reply I will not feel that you have treated me badly or unjustly. I shall merely put this question to you: If by some chance, some strange freak of fortune, I were suddenly to become socially on a level with yourself, with an income sufficient to rebut any charge of improvidence, would you—could you think it possible——"

"What is the good of trying to answer such a question? Do you think that all girls lay such stress upon social position? Do you think that if a girl loves a man she cares a farthing whether he has a farthing or not? I do not feel equal to imagining you other than you are."

"And you send me away from you like this?"

"I did not say anything about sending you away."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I only mean that if you are a fool I am one too—only a greater."

"What! Is it possible that you—you——"

She put out a hand to him. He caught it up to his lips and kissed it passionately a dozen times.

She gave a sudden cry.

"You hound—you menial hound!"

Mr. Mahony was not ten yards away. In another second he was not a single yard away. He leaped from the low bank of the river to the little patch of sand where they were standing. They were apart now.

He raised his stick.

"You miserable hound!" he said in a low voice tremulous with anger. "Your protection is that I am an old man."

"Yours, you mean, sir," said the other. "Your protection is that you are an old man, and the father of the girl whom I love, and who loves me."

"Liar—liar—liar!" cried the father, and he struck a furious downward blow at the other man. But Kathleen had no reason to utter the cry that she gave; the man had caught the stick, and flung it into the river as though it were no more than a

twig that was blown down upon him by a stray breath of air.

The girl caught her father's arm.

"You must not—you shall not!" she cried. "Have you not heard me say that I love him?"

He paid no attention to her. He treated her as though she were a child babbling beside him when he was engaged at some important business. He was standing with his hands clenched, his face white with anger and contempt.

"You miserable coward! You have not even the manliness to take your punishment like a man!" he said.

"I do not wish you to strike a blow that you would be sorry for as long as you live," said the other. "Mr. Mahony, will you let me have one word with you apart?"

"Like your impudence! A word apart with you! Like master like man. I said so once before, and I say so once again. When he chose you as the bearer of that impudent letter—that type of all that snobbish insolence could devise—offering me as if I were a pauper a day's fishing in the river where I and my fathers have fished for a thousand years—he chose a congenial messenger. I thought that I saw through his tricks, and I knew how to foil them. He did not find me fool enough to play

into his hands. But whatever he may be, he is not the scoundrel that you are!"

The face of the man to whom he was speaking became white. He took a quick step towards Mr. Mahony; but Kathleen held up a warning hand, and he became rigid.

"Father," she cried, "you shall not dare. It is you who are the coward—insulting the man who cannot return your insults—the man who, you know, has too good a spirit to fling you into the river."

"You unnatural daughter! Oh, was ever a man so cursed with his children as I am?"

"You should be ashamed to talk in such a strain," she said indignantly. "Have I ever failed in my duty as a daughter? You know as well as I do that I have always been devoted to you and your interests."

"Speak the truth, girl," he cried. "You refused last year the man whom I wished you to marry; you laughed at him for some whim of your own—heaven knows what it was—you refuse him—insult him for this—this—this miserable sneak who entices you down to the river, playing upon your liking for sport to make a fool of you! And he has done it—you are a fool! You will be the laughing-stock of the whole countryside—a Mahony rejecting Lord

Clanreagh in order to be made love to by a game-keeper! You have brought disgrace upon your family, and yet you can stand there and plead glibly for the wretch who is responsible for it all!"

"He does not need any one to plead for him," said she. "He is a man of honour, and I am not ashamed of loving him. I do not care what people say. What have the people here ever done for me—or for you either? I tell you that this—this—gentleman—this man—he is a man—has never by word or action behaved other than as a man of truth and honour and good feeling would behave."

"A falsehood!" cried her father bitterly. "He has taught you to lie, that is what he has done—this man of honour. Had he not the effrontery to carry you in his arms to and from the Stone of Dunesk when you spent the morning in his company? Where was your man of truth and honour and good feeling then? Ah, I don't wonder that you blush. The fame of that exploit will be round the whole of the west by now. You will have a good deal of blushing to do before the end of the year."

"Go to the man who spied upon us and ask him to tell you the circumstances that forced me to avail myself of—of—no, I shall suggest nothing; go to your spy and let him tell you all there is to be told. I shall make no attempt to defend myself."

Before she had said her last word she had left her father's side and had gone to the other man. She gave him her hand.

"I have given you to understand that I love you," she said. "You knew that I spoke the truth."

"I know it," he said.

"I admit that I struggled against the love for you which I felt coming to me," she continued. "I admit that I thought that I should be foolish were I to yield to my impulse. I did my best to reason myself out of what I tried to feel was an infatuation; but I was not successful. We are parting now, and we may be separated for years—for ever."

"No, no; banish that thought from your mind," he cried. Then he turned to the girl's father, who was pacing the narrow sandy bend of the river bed. "Mr. Mahony," he said, "will you not give me your ear for a minute? Will you not allow me to offer you an explanation of my conduct? I believe that I can satisfy you as to the sincerity of my motives. Sir, I throw myself on your mercy."

"How dare you address me, you scoundrel?" said Mr. Mahony. "It is in keeping with your brazen-faced impudence to suggest that you can offer me a satisfactory explanation of your conduct. I tell you, sirrah, that your conduct admits of no

explanation. You have behaved like a designing scoundrel, and if I find that you endeavour to hold any further communication with my daughter, I swear to you that I shall have you beaten like the hound that you are."

"And I swear to you, sir, that I will endeavour to communicate with your daughter at every opportunity there arises," said the other coolly.

"And you may depend upon my answering you," said Kathleen.

"Nothing shall shake my confidence in you, my dearest!" he said. Once more he turned to her father. "Let me assure you, Mr. Mahony," he said, "you will not have me beaten like a hound, or any other animal as noble as a hound."

"You taunt me because I am an old man," cried the father. "You think that you can go any length you please with me because I cannot retaliate. But you shall know later on, please God, that I'm not the only one of my house who is jealous of its honour—you will find that there is another of my name who will treat you as you deserve."

"I shall be glad to meet any member of your household who will listen to reason, and who will not condemn a man without giving him a chance of making an explanation," said the other. "So far

as you are concerned, Mr. Mahony, I acknowledge frankly that you had great reason to be angry."

"Sir, you are very obliging—that is a generous admission indeed," sneered Mr. Mahony.

"But you will regret much more than I do, being so—so pig-headed as to refuse to hear me in my own defence," said the other.

"Oh, the fellow is insufferable!" muttered the elder man. Then he caught Kathleen by the arm. "Come along, you romantic fool," he said. "You will thank me to your dying day for having saved you from this fellow."

"I will go with you, father," she said; "but I do so giving him my promise, and nothing shall induce me to break it. He is the one whom I love, and he knows that I shall never cease to love him whatever may happen."

"You fool! The fellow is laughing at you already," said her father, and surely enough the fellow was smiling quite pleasantly.

"No, Mr. Mahony," said he; "I am only smiling at the thought that probably the next time you meet me it will be to offer me a humble apology for the words you have spoken to me to-day, although I send you away now assuring you that no apology is necessary—that I fully sympathize with your attitude."

Mr. Mahony stared at him for several moments.

"Heavens above, the fellow is off his head!" he cried.

He caught his daughter by the arm. She waved a good-bye to her lover; he was still smiling and more queerly than ever.

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CHAPTER XXII

IT was not to be expected that an impetuous father and an equally impetuous daughter could play leading parts in antagonism to each other in such a scene as that which took place on the bank of the river, and then walk home side by side as if nothing had happened. It so happened, however, that they did not rage very furiously together that day. They both seemed to feel that they had exhausted all the possibilities of the situation. They had both said all that it was possible to say when they had been at the river, and they had no mind to repeat themselves.

Only with the coming of tea did an opportunity occur for a variation in the line of their controversy. A telegram was brought to Mr. Mahony, and before he opened it Kathleen knew that it came from Desmond to tell them that he would be with them the next day.

He tossed it on the table in front of her.

"A pretty home-coming!" he said. "He will

hear when he is in gaol that his only sister has made herself the laughing-stock of the country."

"Whatever he may hear," said she, "he will not hear it in gaol."

"What do you mean?" he cried. "Are you fool enough to fancy that he can come to such a place as this without being recognized."

"That may be so," she said. "But I have found out that no warrant was ever issued for his arrest, and that no one except Captain Kenney ever hinted at his having done anything dishonourable, not to say criminal. He may come and go as he pleases."

"Who has been talking to you?" he said. "Have you been fool enough to discuss the matter with some servant?"

"I have not been a fool this time," she said. "The foolishness—foolishness almost incredible—was in thinking that that man Kenney could speak the truth. You and I were the simpletons who allowed ourselves to be hoodwinked these three years by what that man said."

"Who is it that has told you this—this—told you that Desmond—that no warrant has been issued?"

"I heard it from some one whom I can trust—whom I have trusted implicitly."

A thought seemed to strike him.

"Is it possible that your infatuation has led you

to tell that—that—fellow that Desmond was coming home ? " he cried.

" Yes; I certainly told him so—I trust him implicitly," she replied.

" You trust him ? Oh, what a simple fool you have been ! I see it all now. You have placed me completely in Ainlie's power. Oh, I might have known what game he meant to play ! I had an instinct of it at first when he wrote that letter to me inviting me to fish in the river. I had a suspicion that he wanted to get the better of me—that he wanted to see my family humiliated to the full. Well, he has succeeded—he has succeeded, thanks to you, Kathleen."

He had changed his tone from one of anger to one of mournful reproach. He felt that he was King Lear and that she was one of the ungrateful daughters—he was stricken down with grief.

" I am sure that you do Major Ainlie a great injustice," she said. " What good would it do him to see us humiliated ? "

" He saw that I suspected him," resumed the sorrowing father, paying no attention to her protest. " He saw that I was too wary for him, so he sent his spy to worm our secret out of you; he had no trouble with you, you confided all to that man, and he has then the effrontery to try to put us

altogether off our guard by assuring you that Desmond will be safe. Oh, but you were easily duped!"

"Father!"

"And not content with playing the part of Judas so far, he must needs fool you further. Oh, child, you should go down on your knees and thank heaven that you have a father to snatch you out of his power before it is too late."

"You are insulting to me as well as to him," she cried. "You should be ashamed to talk in such a strain of a man who is—a—he is a gentleman by birth and education, although he may only be a gamekeeper in the employment of Major Ainlie."

"No doubt you have his word for that."

"That is enough for me."

"So it appears; and his word respecting your brother was enough for you too. I know that sort of plausible scoundrel."

"Father—I refuse to listen to such slanders against——"

"Like master like man! I said so from the first. Whatever chance Desmond had before, he has none now. Ainlie and his jackal are at this moment in council with Singer as to the best time to arrest your brother, and he will have you to thank for it."

She rose from her seat, looked at him for a few moments, and then left the room.

Of course, when she reached her own apartment she found herself in a torrent of tears. Who could hear such words as her father had uttered against the man whom she had come to love as she had never before loved any one, without such tears as now deluged her pillow ?

But when her paroxysm was over she found herself more at ease than she had been for several days.

She could sit down and think out the whole situation of the moment.

Of course she knew now for certain that it was Captain Kenney who had played the spy upon her, and communicated the result of his observation to her father. She could not help smiling as she thought what the feelings of the horrid man must have been when he watched her being carried in the arms of the one who had caused him so much inconvenience in the region of at least one shoulder-blade. What would the little wretch not have given to be in the other man's place ? But it would have been rather hard on her, for most certainly he would have let her fall into the river had he been privileged to emulate the feat which he had reported to her father.

And then she began to feel that, after all, Captain Kenney had done her a good turn in playing the part of a spy ; for had her father not followed

her down to the river, and appeared before her just at the most interesting moment, it would have been her duty—and she would not have shrunk from it—to face her father and impart to him the news that she had promised to love Major Ainlie's gamekeeper or water-bailiff or whatever he might be. This would have been an exceedingly unpleasant duty, but she was spared the facing of it by the machinations of Captain Kenney.

And how did she feel now that she had given her promise to the young man?

Well, her first sensation was of a great relief.

She had always had lofty ideas of love. That was how it came that at the age of twenty-two she was still unmarried. In addition to that distinguished peer to whom her father had casually alluded, several men, more or less eligible, had wished to marry her during the previous three years; but she had refused them all—to say nothing of Captain Kenney—because of her high ideals.

And yet now she could find an unending pleasure in the reflection that she had promised to love a man who had once been a private soldier, and who was now only an outdoor servant! She told the truth when she said she was quite indifferent to what people might say when they knew that the fastidious Kathleen Mahony was engaged to be

married to a man who dared not speak to a gentleman without touching his cap. What did she care? A colonel in the army touched his cap to a major-general, and a major-general to a lieutenant-general, and the lieutenant-general to a general, and so on. There was no humiliation in that.

A dozen other details in connection with the duties of a gamekeeper suggested themselves to her, and she smoothed away every one of them with the gentle sophistries of love. He was the one man whom she loved—the first man whom she had loved, whatsoever else he might be; and she was content to love him. She did not even think with regret of such an important detail of his position in life as that which had a bearing upon his income. She was not in a mood to ask herself if it was two pounds a week that he got from Major Ainlie, or two pounds ten. What did it matter? He would be unable to marry even if his wages approached the noble sum of three pounds. She was not thinking of marrying, she was only thinking of loving, and she knew that she would have loved him even if he had no more than a pound a week.

Before she slept that night she had written to him, and, moreover, had put the letter on the way of being sent to him, so fully does love develop a young woman's tendency to duplicity. She told him in

the letter just what she had told him by word of mouth—namely, that he might trust her never to forget him—never to forget that she had given him her promise, even though they might never meet again.

She slept quite comfortably that night.

The next day her brother arrived. It was late in the evening when he appeared, and she had not exchanged a word with her father all the day. Desmond Mahony was marvellously changed since they had seen him last. Kathleen felt that he need not have been so careful in keeping up the collar of his overcoat and his cap down on his eyes, when driving from the railway station. No one in the neighbourhood would have guessed that the big, brown, well-developed man was Desmond Mahony, the slim, clean-shaven youth who had ridden in many a steeplechase.

She herself could hardly believe that the man was her brother, so altered was he in every way. Like so many of his countrymen who leave their own country, he had done extremely well in a responsible position in South Africa. He had lost his careless, rollicking manner, and seemed impressed with a sense of responsibility.

He had a good deal to say about the war. He

had joined, under an assumed name, a body of irregular cavalry whose designation as Scouts had become a household word in England; and it was when he was recovering from a wound requiring careful nursing that he was brought in contact with a man who had taken a fancy to him. They were in hospital together and the war had come to an end before they were both on their feet again, and just as he was wondering what he should turn his hand to, his new-found friend had come to him with the offer of an excellent appointment in Natal. Of course, he had jumped at the offer; he found his duties highly congenial; and he was giving satisfaction to his employers who were liberal and appreciative.

"It was when my third promotion came, three months ago," continued Desmond, in the narration of his adventures to his father and sister, "that I thought it was mean of me to continue in the place under the name I bore in the Scouts—Charley O'Brien—there was no use trying to disguise that I was an Irishman."

"You had every reason to be proud of it," said his father.

"Oh, of course I was—mighty proud of it," resumed Desmond. "But I did not feel that I should sneak into a position of responsibility without

making a clean breast of everything. I had the best of reasons for such a feeling. The fact is that there was a girl who became interested in me, and I could not ask her to share my name until I had told her what my real name was."

"Quite right, my boy. I hope that she is worthy to share the name of Mahony."

"There is no one of the name of Mahony who is good enough for her. Of course, I not only told her and her father—he is the head of the firm—my name, but I also told them why it was I left Ireland; and that is how it comes that I am here to-day. They sent me back to the place I came from."

"They turned you adrift because you were manly enough to confess?" said his father.

"Not they. I believe that Mr. Marsden appreciated my motives in confessing to him. He put a few questions to me regarding the crime that forced me to clear off, and I told him the truth. I told him all about the bank and the forged bill that I had lodged with the forged name on the back—I showed him all the letters and documents which I had kept bearing upon the business."

"And what was the result?"

"The result was that he laughed at me. What a pity it was that none of us knew anything of

business! Great King Malachi! When I think of all that I went through—of the sleepless nights, of the heart-breaking days, thinking over the disgrace of having a warrant issued for my arrest—but, as it so turned out, everything was for the best. If I had not left here when I did, I would surely have come to grief long ago!"

"Why should he laugh at you? Forgery is no laughing matter."

"You are right; that's why he laughed. Forgery! It took him exactly five minutes to prove to me that there was no question of forgery in the matter. Kenney and I were partners in the horse that was sold; and the bill that I lodged in the bank was given to me by him as my share of the sale. If there was any forgery it was done by Kenney before the thing came into my hands."

Mr. Mahony started up.

"Is it possible?" he cried. "Good heavens! Whom can one trust? He professed to be your friend. He offered to lend me more money."

"That's the man to be suspicious of—the man who offers you money before you ask for it," said the shrewd Desmond Mahony. "He professed to be my friend to the last—that's another suspicious point. It was he who told me that if I remained another day in Ireland I should be arrested. You

remember I swore that I would remain and fight the thing out ? "

"You did—that was what a true Mahony would have done," said the head of the Family. "But to think of Kenney! Oh, the scoundrel! "

"Scoundrel! I made up my mind to stay; but he so worked upon me—saying that the disgrace would kill you, father—everything like that—imploring me to think of my family, and so on. That is why I consented."

"But you knew that you were innocent."

"Yes; but it was Kenney who assured me that in the eyes of the law I was guilty, having lodged the forged bill to my credit in the bank."

"The bill that you had from him ? The rascal! "

"I was the fool—and such a fool! Why, any idiot should have been able to see through Kenney; but, as I say, it all turned out for the best. I got recommended to a post that any man might be proud to hold, and I'm engaged to marry the most charming girl in the world, who will have a fortune of I don't know how many thousand pounds."

There was a long silence before Mr. Mahony laid his hand on Desmond's shoulder, saying—"My son! My son! I should like to shake the man by the hand who did you that good turn. And you say

that he was a stranger to you? But he must have been an Irishman."

"He was an Englishman—a wealthy Englishman who had invested forty or fifty thousand pounds in the firm to whom he recommended me."

"I would go a thousand miles to shake him by the hand. And now that you have come home——"

"Mr. Marsden advised me to have it out with Kenney, and I mean to have it out with him before another day is over. I mean to be down on him before he knows that I am here. I shall rid the country of that snake."

Then the resolute young man, who a few years before had been a shallow, careless youth with no sense of responsibility, began to talk on a variety of subjects with the ease and confidence of a man of the world who has been away from home and done well for himself; and all the time he was talking his sister sat silently in a corner listening to him, her face glowing at times and her eyes sparkling. When the name of Kenney was mentioned her father gave a hasty glance in her direction; but she immediately lowered her eyes. She refrained from making any remark respecting Kenney—or any one else. She did not say "I told you so," as so many other girls would have done at that moment. She remembered the many feuds which

she had had with her father because she could not be persuaded to treat Kenney with the courtesy which had ever seemed to be part of her nature, and she also remembered some more recent incidents.

After dinner, when Kathleen had gone to her room, and the father and son were sitting on each side of the fire with their cigars, the latter said—

"What has come over Kathy, father? I have been wondering if my recollection of her can be hopelessly astray, as it is of so much that has struck me since I returned."

His father frowned and looked into the fire. He did not speak for a long time, but at last he said—

"Last Christmas she threw away the best chance of her life. She was staying with the Wallands in Dorsetshire, and there she met Lord Clanreagh. It was understood that he was devoted to her, and only waiting for a chance to propose. The party was got up by the Wallands to give him his chance."

"And she refused him? Well done, Kathy!" cried Desmond when his father made a pause.

"Good heavens, sir, what do you mean?" cried Mr. Mahony. "I tell you she refused him —she refused Clanreagh, the most ancient Vis-

county in Ireland, and a good ten thousand a year to maintain it. Are you as mad as your sister ? "

"I don't think that refusing Clanreagh was much evidence of madness," said Desmond. "I came across him many times when I was here, and, unless my memory is at fault again, he is a bit of a rotter—as close-fisted as a Scotchman, and, like all fellows of that stamp, not above doing a shabby thing if he could get an extra half-crown by it. Kathy is well rid of him."

"You talk as if you had seen nothing of the world," said his father, flinging the end of his cigar into the fire. "What can the daughter of a ruined house hope for better than she was offered ? To be sure, Clanreagh is no longer a very young man."

"I should say not, indeed. He runs close upon fifty."

"Nothing of the sort—only forty-eight—you may see his age in every peerage. But no matter about that. I hold that refusing his offer was an act of incredible folly—no Irish girl that I ever knew would have shown herself to be such a fool."

"I think better of Irish girls than that. And is it the thought of what she has missed of her own free will that makes her glum ? I expected to see her brighten up when I told her of my good luck;

and so she did, but only for a moment. Something else is the matter."

"I should think that something else is the matter."

Mr. Mahony rose from his chair and walked across the room, his hands clenched, and a look in his eyes that his son remembered but too well, however impaired his memory may have been on other matters.

"I should think that something else is the matter. Desmond, it was a relief to me to hear that you were returning to-day; though I admit that at first I feared you were running an unnecessary risk. I longed to have you by my side yesterday, when I went down to the river and found Kathleen with the arm of a groom—a gamekeeper—about her waist."

It was now the turn of the younger man to spring to his feet. The exclamation that accompanied the action was the strongest that astonishment could provoke.

"Kathleen—my sister—your daughter—a groom—a servant—oh, the thing is impossible!" he cried.

"Two days ago I would have said it was impossible," groaned the father. "If any one had come to me and sworn that she had been guilty

of such an act, I should have knocked him down. But I saw it with my own eyes—I heard the words they exchanged. When I showed myself, they both brazened it out. The fellow showed that he had a glib tongue—a plausible scoundrel, like so many of these English servants."

"An Englishman ?"

"The English servant of the man who turned me out of the castle."

"Yes, I heard that some one had bought the place; you never told me what his name was. Never mind, you are not talking of the master, but of the man now. But Kathleen—oh, surely she would not forget herself—her family—a gamekeeper, did you say ?"

"A gamekeeper. I learned that she had been in the habit of meeting him, and I found them together as I told you."

"I wish that I had been there. I would have flung the fellow into the river."

"I would have given the remainder of my life to have had you by my side, my boy. My last words to him were that I had a son who would lay the lash of a dog-whip over his shoulders before he was much older."

"And you spoke the truth, sir. I will flog him within an inch of his life. Give me the chance,

and you will see. Tell me where he is to be found, and you will see. Thank God that I returned at this time! Did you say that she listened to him—that she allowed him to lay his hand upon her?"

"She stood up before me—I would not have believed it possible—and harangued me about love—love—she loved him—he was a man—she would never forget him—all the rest of it. Oh, she talked like the girl in the melodrama—high-falutin' rubbish! And we had always thought her above that sort of thing."

"It was the rascal who led her up to this—I know that type of man; but a gamekeeper—a man with a pound a week! Tell me where he is to be found. I swear to you that I will not leave a bit of flesh on his bones. Do not fret about Kathleen. She will be all right when once the man disappears, and I promise you that he will not remain for very long in the same place with me."

"Give me your hand, my boy. I knew that I could trust you to redeem the honour of the family."

The young man grasped the hand that his father held out to him. He looked at him in the face for a few moments, and then dropped into a chair and burst into tears.

. . . . . .

The next morning the three members of the Mahony family had a very silent breakfast. Kathleen knew by her brother's bearing in regard to her that their father had given him a description of the scene that had taken place on the banks of the salmon river. But she made no attempt to get Desmond into a corner where she might give him her version of the incident. Indeed, she felt sure that Mr. Mahony had only told him the truth. What could she say that would throw a different light upon the fact—upon the main fact, which was that she had given her promise to a man who was of no higher rank in life than a gamekeeper?

An hour later his father came to Desmond saying—

"The fellow has got the impudence of the devil himself; but he has played into our hands. I suspected that he would write to her, and I was not mistaken. I intercepted his letter—it was my duty."

Desmond frowned, but nodded his head in moderate acquiescence in his assertion.

"I did it cautiously, of course, and when I had seen all that I wanted to see of it, I resealed it and let it go to her."

"What did you want to see in it?"

"I wanted to see if he appointed a place of meeting. It seemed from his letter, however,

that the proposal had come from her. She must have written to him on Saturday. At any rate, he gave the secret away. They are to meet on the river opposite the Stone of Dunesk as soon after noon as possible."

"I shall be there too," said Desmond resolutely.

"*We* shall be there," said his father.

They saw Kathleen walk boldly down the little carriage-drive shortly before twelve; and after a prudent interval they followed her, Desmond carrying a short but serviceable dog-whip. They did not wish to run the chance of being seen walking along the river bank, so made a circuit, approaching the bank opposite the great crag in midstream, and keeping among the trees. When they approached the bank they heard the faint sound of voices. In another moment they saw Kathleen with the man by her side, standing on the brink of the river.

Desmond leapt the narrow ditch at the shoreward side of the patch, and almost before he had alighted on the other side, he said—

"I must speak a word with you, my good fellow."

The man turned quickly round and faced him. "Well, sir?" said he.

Desmond stared at him, and his arm that he had raised aggressively fell by his side.

"My God—Ainlie!" he cried.

"Hallo! O'Brien, what are you doing here?" said Ainlie.

Desmond gasped. He seemed trying to speak, but his words failed to come. He turned to Kathleen, who was looking almost as surprised as her brother. Some seconds had passed before he managed to say—

"Where is the—the gamekeeper, sir?"

"He stands before you. Do your duty, sir!" cried Mr. Mahony.

"This is no gamekeeper, father; this is Major Ainlie—the man to whom I owe everything—the man who set me up in South Africa."

"It seems that your name is Mahony at home, old chap," said the remaining man.

"Yes," said Desmond weakly. "My name is Mahony. Oh, my aunt! This is a funny thing! Who is the gamekeeper?"

It was Kathleen who tried to explain.

"Major Ainlie has told me the truth only within the past five minutes," said she. "It was very wrong of him to pass himself off as his own gamekeeper, simply because he had fallen in love with me last May at Ranelagh, and he feared that I should be prejudiced against him because he happened to buy the castle from the people who held the mortgage; but perhaps on the whole——"

"And I never knew that she was the sister of Trooper O'Brien of the Scouts," said Ainlie. "But perhaps on the whole——"

"Major Ainlie," cried Mr. Mahony, "I told my son yesterday that I should be proud to shake you by the hand."

"And I am proud to shake yours, sir," said Ainlie. "I am prouder, because you used words to me which I admit were most appropriate to the situation as you imagined it. May I hope, Mr. Mahony——"

He turned to Kathleen. She did not see him. She was pointing out to her brother a figure hiding among the low trees on the opposite side of the river.

"By the brave King Malachi, I am in luck!" cried Desmond, picking up the dog-whip he had dropped. He looked across the river.

"You ruffian—you forger!" he cried. "I have a word to say to you. The whip will not be wasted after all," he added, turning to his father.

He spoke the truth, for the very waving of it across the river sent Captain Kenney flying, not merely from his spying-place, but from the neighbourhood. He disappeared that day and was never seen in the county again.

There was an interesting dinner that night

at Rathdearg Castle, and Mr. Mahony took his place at the head of the table. He had often done so before. He felt when in that position singularly well qualified to appreciate the feelings of his prototype Job. He believed that he had much in common with the Uzite. He actually believed that he had had the patience of Job under even more trying conditions than those imposed upon the patriarch; and that, through his exercise of this admirable virtue, prosperity had come upon him with a rush.

When he gave oratorical expression to this conviction—the dinner had been an excellent one—St. Maur coughed, and then smiled very gently.

Ainlie kicked him on the shins under the table.

So that it might perhaps not be going too far to suggest that he gave promise of becoming an excellent son-in-law.

THE END

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